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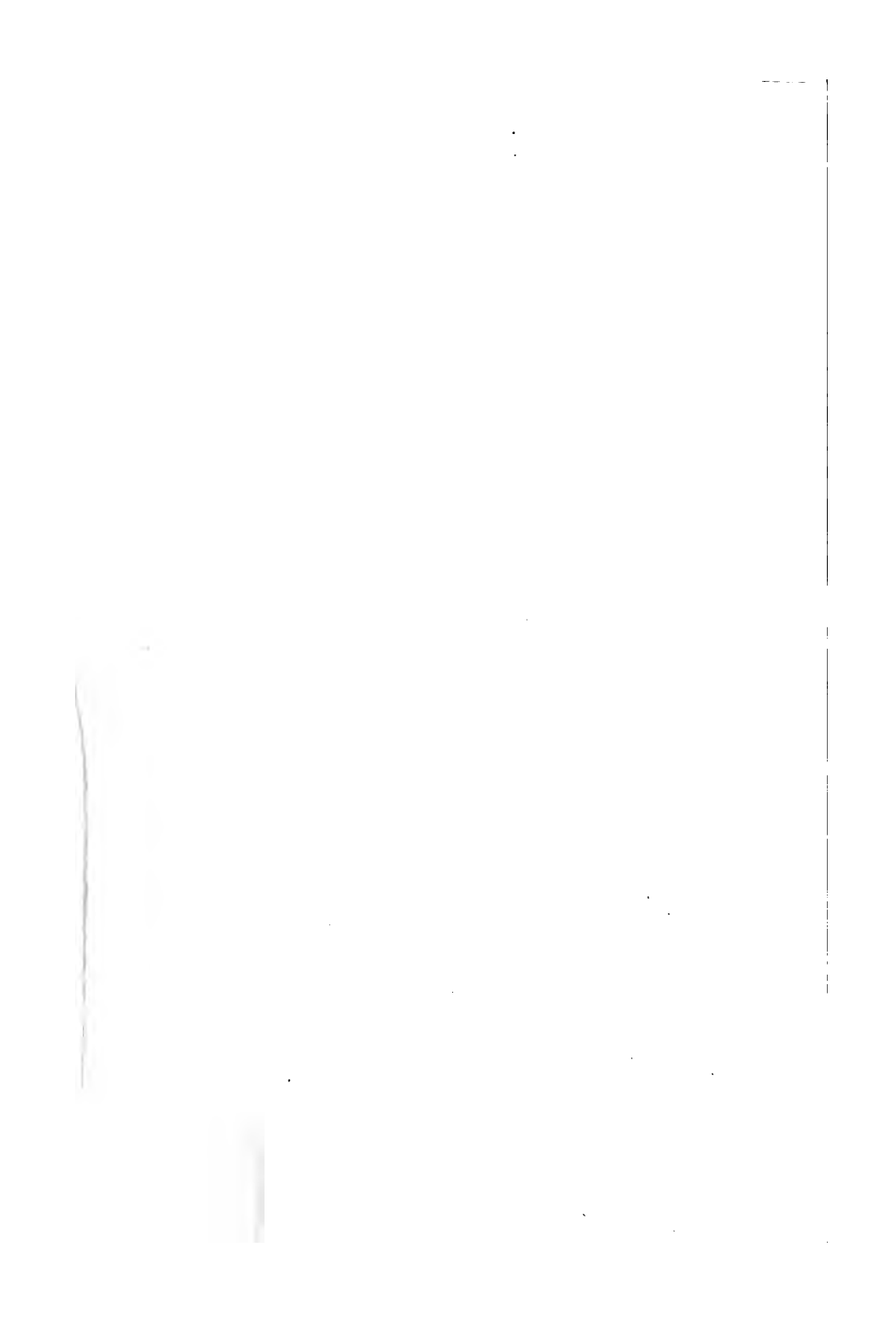
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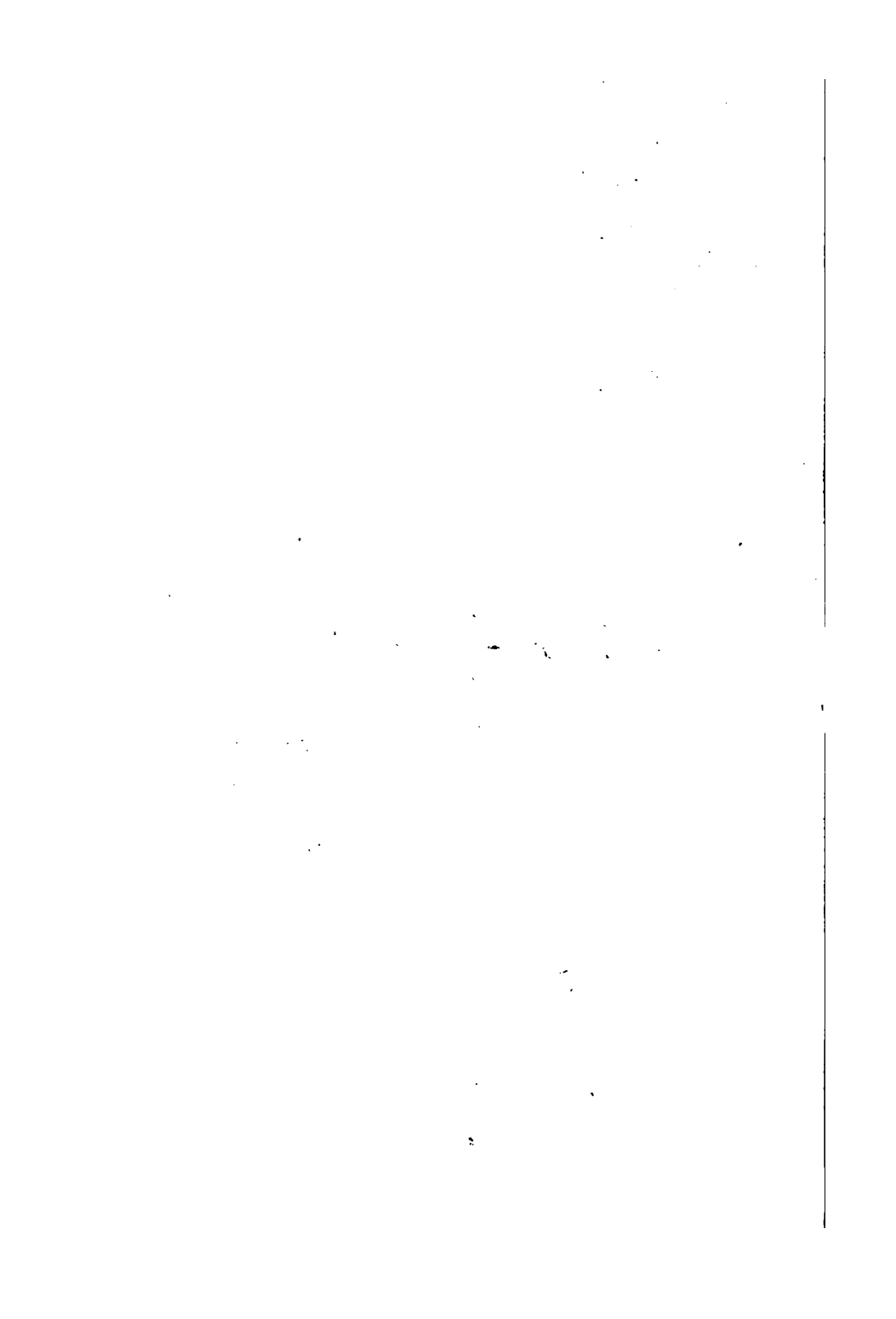
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A DARK SECRET.



# A DARK SECRET.

BY

ELIZA RHYL DAVIES,

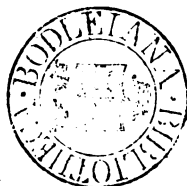
AUTHOR OF

"THE MYSTERY OF ASHLEIGH MANOR."

"The idea of thy life shall sweetly creep,  
Into my study of imagination;  
And every lovely organ of thy life  
Shall come apparelled in more precious habit—  
More moving delicate, and full of life,  
Into the eye and prospect of my soul,  
Than when thou livedst indeed."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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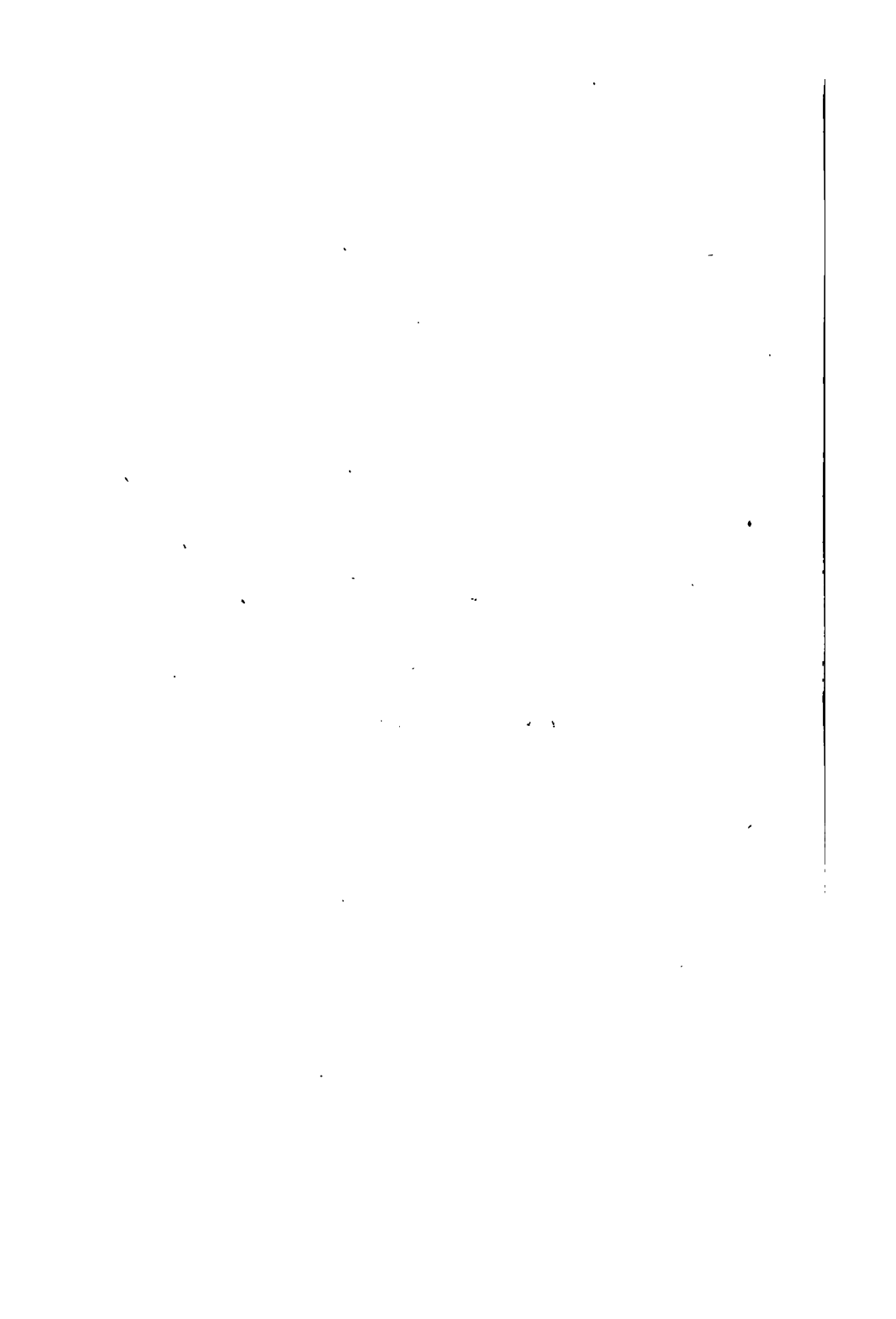




**Dedicated**

**TO**

**GRACE IRVING.**



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# A DARK SECRET.



## CHAPTER I.

DR. ERSKINE FRASER.

If parting of friends, absence alone, can work such violent effects, what shall death do, when they must eternally be separated, never in this world to meet again? . . . They that are most staid and patient, are so furiously carried headlong by the passion of sorrow in their case, that brave discreet men otherwise often forget themselves, and weep like children many months together.—*Robert Burton.*

WHEN the nineteenth century was a good many years younger than it now is, a certain Dr. Erskine Fraser, who had made

himself known in London as a successful practitioner, sold his practice and left the profession.

Some thought he did this because of his temper.

"Nothing," his friends used to say, "can justify Abernethy's temper but Abernethy's genius, which Fraser doesn't exactly possess."

Mrs. Candour asked the question : If he had not made a grave professional blunder which preyed upon his mind and obliged him to retire ?

There were others who doubted if his nerves were equal to the scenes of suffering and grief he was, day after day, called to witness. He was unquestionably a man of great sensibility, which hard study in other walks than that of medicine had

refined to a degree that was almost morbid.

The simpler a truth is, the harder it is to hit

Moreover, and this is serious, "there be that delight in giddiness, and count it a bondage to fix a belief affecting free will in thinking as well as acting.\*

Dr. Fraser gave up his profession for no other reason than the loss of his wife, to whom he was tenderly attached. Her death for a time almost broke him down with grief. All interest temporarily went out of life. The dear face that for twenty years had blessed his going and welcomed his coming with smiles; the loving patience ever ready to partake his troubles and lighten his share of them; the hopeful

\* Bacon.



presence that had filled his home with sunshine—were gone.

Sorrow had entered all familiar things, and darkened the world to his gaze.

He was a reserved man, and scarcely his own daughter knew how great was his grief.

He resumed his professional duties with an effort. But he could not subdue his growing distaste for them.

His sensibility, rendered exquisitely susceptible by his recent bitter experience, shrank from every spectacle of human suffering. The mother weeping over her sick infant—the wife clinging to her dying husband—those death-bed struggles of which custom had half-hardened him to the unspeakable pathos—unmanned him. They imparted a cruel significance

to the whispers of memory. They unfitted him for his work, and left him helpless as any stricken spectator in the presence of the sufferings he was entreated to mitigate.

He determined to withdraw from his profession, and retire with his daughter into the country.

In truth, the house in which he had spent nearly the whole of his married life was no longer a home to him. Sorrow had desolated it, filled its familiar rooms with painful memories, which came like living things to finger his unhealed wounds.

He advertised his practice, and in a short time found a purchaser.

I visited the Gray House near Milborough, not very long ago. There

is nothing sombre or suggestive in it. Lovers of the grotesque or horrible would hardly pitch upon it as a stage for the performance of their goblin dramas.

The hard characteristics of Georgian architecture are everywhere discernible in front. The windows are numerous, the casements are level with the walls, the glass is dark and bright. I can never peer into this kind of windows without expecting to see the outline of a mahogany table loaded with fruit and wine, and a stout elderly gentleman asleep in an arm-chair, fondling a half-emptied wine-glass. The fancy will, perhaps, be excused. These windows belong to a festive period in the history of English society, when dining-room doors were locked and magnums plied until the floor was littered with the company.

But to proceed with my description of the Gray House, for this is the theatre of the drama. The roof is of slate; the eaves are capacious, and in summer are crowded with swallows' nests. There is a great hedge dividing the property from the roadway; you pass through a gate to the house along a narrow flint walk, and brush the thick evergreens as you advance.

The door is so solid that one might think the old fellow who built the house had the bailiffs in his mind when he gave instructions about it. But it is a real pleasure to open and shut that door. The great weight of oak, the easy swing, the unerring, noiseless hinges, tell of times when men who built considered posterity as much as themselves, and had no notion of the world ending at their death, as must

surely be the creed of the modern architect.

The rooms are haunted by a faint smell of lavender, such as you sniff in old books which have been locked away for fifty years.

The back of the house is altogether picturesque. Here the builder forgot his Georgian decorum, and indulged in an Arcadian frolic.

Great bay windows stand out on either side a porch, the wooden supporters of which are covered with rude medallions, rough relievos, representing Pan with his cloven feet and pipe; silly Narcissus looking at himself in a well; Flora walking a minuet, accompanied by a goat, her head and shoulders covered with fruit, resembling strings of onions.

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You look from the porch upon the grounds, which on a summer's day present a charming view, with the great trees rearing their solemn heads, whilst the breeze sports with their leaves and sets the green sward twinkling.

## CHAPTER II.

### HELEN.

Once in a while one meets with a single soul greater than all the living pageant which passes before it. This was one of them. As I looked upon her tranquil face, I saw that eye, and lip, and every shifting lineament were made for love—unconscious of their sweet office as yet, and meeting the cold aspect of Duty with the natural graces which were meant for the record of nothing less than the great Passion.—*O. W. Holmes.*

DR. FRASER was a man who professed, and really felt, a great indifference to the opinion of society.

This may have come from his having been a great deal behind the scenes during

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his professional life, and observed how much society is governed by unwise prejudices, and how really worthless its opinions are.

But one consequence of his indifference was to render him unpopular.

When he first took the Gray House, people called, and among the visitors were some good names, persons of position, not too proud—albeit hedged about with the hundred bucolic prejudices that make provincial people absurdly ridiculous in the eyes of those who live in large cities—to cultivate the acquaintance of a distinguished London doctor.

But Fraser made no response to their civil advances.

He cared nothing about these people, and did not want their company.



He could not be voted low—there was no mistaking him for anything but a gentleman—but he was considered eccentric ; and decidedly insulting when it was discovered that he constantly had at his table such persons as Dr. Bush, the school-master, who was a nobody in the place, and an old decayed man of letters, whose pen, but not his tongue, had failed him, and who had a pension of eighty pounds a year to live on.

Choice of this kind was inexplicable. It excited gossip and some scandal ; and then people got used to it, and yawned when it was mentioned, and presently forgot to think of it.

But Fraser was a reserved man, and there was nobody in Milborough he condescended to explain his conduct to, which

he might have done in a few words by saying that Bush and the old man of letters could talk with him on books and art ; and that if General Lowndes, or Sir Thomas Haggis, or Colonel Burton, or any of the "important" people of the place, could converse with him on these subjects as the two old men he had made friends with did—if, indeed, they could converse on any other subject than their wives and daughters, their horses and crops, the Local Board, parochial rates, the vicar's last sermon, and the prospects of war, they would be welcome to his dinners, and he would accept their invitations.

But this was not all.

The death of his wife had made a wound in his heart, and he had left London to hide himself, to nurse his melan-

choly, to indulge his taste in enjoyments, such as study and the accumulation of books and curiosities, which could not reproach him with neglect of the dear memory he hid.

He did not want society. Had he left London for it ?

All his life he had been in it, learning its stupid secrets, sounding its shallow depths, peering through the holes which disease and death tore in the drapery that made it graceful ; and now he wished to be alone, to forget of his past all but the one great happiness it had held, and which was now extinguished.

“ Hear me, O my countrymen !” says Susarion—

“ *Malæ sunt mulieres, veruntamen O populares  
Hoc sine malo, domum inhabitare non licet.*”

---

But to one person Dr. Fraser had, unconsciously, given more offence than to any other.

This was Lady Haddon, a worldly woman, who had buried two husbands, the latter being a general who had received a knighthood for his services.

This lady, on hearing of Dr. Fraser's arrival at the Gray House, and attaching importance to the rumour that had got abroad of his wealth—greatly exaggerated, of course, for the doctor's income did not exceed a thousand a year—had made haste to call upon him, and found him, as she afterwards owned, not only a very handsome, but a very elegant man.

This was just praise which everybody at that time accorded; for the doctor had received his visitors with the marked urbanity

and polish that had made him a great favourite among the women when practising.

It befell that a foolish servant committed a blunder.

Ten days after her ladyship's visit she expressed her surprise in the presence of the foolish servant, that Dr. Fraser had not returned her call.

The foolish servant declared that he had.

"Why had she not given his card to her ladyship?"

The gentleman had left no card.

Lady Haddon thought this odd, but asked no more questions; which was a pity, for then she might have discovered that the servant had mistaken another gentleman, a friend of her son, Horace Len-

den (offspring of her first marriage) for the doctor.

On this Lady Haddon paid Dr. Fraser a second visit, intending to ask him and Helen to dine with her ; but was told they were out. She was meditating a friendly note of invitation, when the foolish servant owned that she had made a mistake, for the gentleman she had thought was the doctor had called that morning, and now she knew his name was Barlow.

Lady Haddon was silly enough to feel deeply mortified.

But she was even sillier than that : she was candid, and told an intimate friend the circumstance, which she rightly declared was entirely attributable to the servant.

The friend repeated the story, omitting all mention of the part the servant had

played ; and it went about that Lady Haddon, in her extreme anxiety to make friends with the handsome and opulent doctor, had voluntarily submitted to as grievous a snubbing as was ever heard of.

In an exaggerated form this story came back to her ladyship, and then she hated Dr. Fraser.

We may naturally suppose that it was Helen's duty to return the calls that had been paid at the Gray House. This she would have done and made friends of everybody but for her father's interdict. With her his slightest wish was law.

"Helen," he had said, "I do not want to have people visiting here. I wish to be alone, or to choose my own friends. I would rather be thought rude than bored."

She understood and obeyed him.

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She made no friends, but no one spoke an unkind word of her. Nay, people had sense enough to see in her sweet face the assurance of a kind and tender heart, and to assume that her isolation was her father's will.

They were sorry for her ; they thought that she must be very dull and sad alone with Dr. Fraser in the Gray House which seemed gloomy to them. Her singularly attractive face won her the kindest greetings, and many were the smiles and even bows which saluted her as she passed through the streets or entered the church whither her father never accompanied her.

No one mentioned her name uncoupled with the relation of some good deed. Very soon after her arrival at Milborough



she was to be seen entering poor people's homes, and what she did there was to be guessed, by the affection and gratitude with which the poor pronounced her name.

An interest not explicable to those who found it, gathered about her.

Her father's eccentricity, as it appeared, kept her outside the sphere of those sympathies, of which, by a paradox, she was at once the inspirer and the central object.

She defeated the conjectures she excited by the most perfect form of fellow-feeling.

No one could comprehend her father's motive in withdrawing her from the world which her presence made bright, which her actions endowed with possibilities which

people might have sought for in vain in most of their neighbours' deeds; but no one could doubt that the fault was not hers, that the will that constrained, or the wish that repressed her, was exercised by her to its final limits, that she might redeem the pledge her pure heart had, perchance, made in a prayer—never to forget the obligations which had been imposed on her with the gift of her tender and beautiful nature.

And certainly her life with her father might well seem a mystery to those whom ignorance of his past life rendered it impossible to drive conjecture deep into his passions and motives.

But what was the mystery?

Scarcely, in reality, anything more surprising than selfishness.

Dr. Fraser was a cold man, and what love he was capable of had been given to his wife. When she was alive he had rarely more than a passing smile for his daughter. He seldom kissed her. But then the rarity of this caress rendered it precious, and when given it made a memory on which her love could sustain its strength for a long time.

He had been a busy man. All day long he was away from home, visiting his patients, returning to a hasty meal, and going to his bed only to be summoned from it.

He saw but little of Helen; and she, catching, so to speak, but glimpses of him, and learning his nature, his talent, his beauty, from her mother's lips which love touched and made eloquent, came to think

of him as a superior being, as something immeasurably exalted, to be viewed from afar with reverence and pride, to be adored rather than loved, whose smile was a condescension, whose kiss was a great and rapturous pleasure, whose words were to be hung on, and remembered, and dreamt of.

A strange fascination ! a delusion which nothing could make tolerable but the humanizing and sweetening process to which it was subjected by the exquisitely womanly heart it possessed.

His wife's death did not bring his daughter any nearer to his love. She was a condition of his daily life indeed ; but quite subsidiary to the interests he gathered about him to quiet his grief.

He thought more about his books and

curiosities than about her. He accepted her striking and wonderful love for him as a tribute rather than as an illustration of the great and rare treasure he had in her.

She did his bidding and he was pleased.

She was an instrument absolutely pliable to his will, and his imperious or impatient nature found her a necessity in his home, admitted her companionable qualities, was even soothed by her gentleness, her sweetness, her modesty, her hundred unobtrusive contrivances for his comfort.

But all this brought her no nearer to his love.

He was, as I have said, capable of but one love in his life : the object of it

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was dead, the channel dry : association might generate a kind of spurious affection, but the deep and holy instincts of the parent were wanting, and all the reverence and devotion she gave him, were but as incense offered to an idol of brass or stone.

An idiosyncrasy which you cannot reconcile to the general experience of human nature is practically a mystery of which there is no solution.

No analysis can lay bare the motive of perversity, for instance ; for here you deal with a subtle agent, concealed and potent, that shapes passion and determines action with invisible force.

I discover nothing by strapping a corpse upon a table and exploring its physiology for the will that enabled it to walk and sit,

for the emotion that prompted it to weep and laugh.

I may take Fraser's mind and subject it to as searching an analysis as you will; but when I have exposed an intellectual conformation similar to your mind and mine, I am stopped by the idiosyncrasy—by the impalpable influence which gives activity to thoughts and passions, in directions where we cannot extend our sympathies—and am defeated by that greatest of psychological riddles—Motive.

Helen had frequently met Louis Haddon, whose acquaintance we shall shortly make, before he called at the Gray House.

Their first meeting was at the house of a poor family, whom Helen had taken under her protection and whom she was visiting when Haddon entered. He was

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learning parish work, as it is called, under Mr. Morgan the vicar ; but was in reality anticipating the duties he was in a year to enter upon.

He met her again and again, always on her merciful errands, always amid interests which, in the eyes of a religious man, would give her a charm comparable to no other kind of charm that a woman can possess.

They spoke to one another of the best means of doing good, with the limited supplies they had at their command. They united in ministering to want and sorrow. And by degrees a love grew up between them, having its source in the recognition of sweetness of heart, of purity of motive, of beauty and singleness of purpose.



He asked permission to call, and she consented, reluctantly, afraid of her father's displeasure.

But Fraser took a fancy to young Had-don. There was a freshness and honesty about the young fellow, that pleased and interested him. He found him well read, a gentleman, liberal in his views, who never obtruded his sentiments, and even seemed to respect a scepticism which his own honesty persuaded him was the fruit of painful thought and earnest inquiry.

He soon became a frequent visitor at the Gray House, and Dr. Fraser easily guessed the attraction that brought him there. But he asked no questions. He took no interest in his daughter's doings. He would remain in his study for a whole day, emerging only at meal-times,

and then address his daughter on the topics which interested him—of a rare book he had written for—of a remarkable fossil that had been offered him for sale—of his History of Milborough, which incessantly ran in his head, which he was always going to begin, and which he was always deferring until he had gathered more materials together.

And you would have thought, to remark Helen's sweet attentive face, when her father spoke of these matters, that there was nothing she cared for in life but books and fossils and local antiquities.

She could sympathise with *him*—follow him with unflagging attention through observations which she could for the most part anticipate, so well did she know his likings ; but he never asked her about her

doings in the town, about the poor, who were dear to her, about Haddon whom she now loved—Haddon who was every day with her, often in the grounds where her father could see them from his study window, often in little cottages reading to blind people, instructing little children, giving money to hungry mothers.

## CHAPTER III.

MR. CREED.

He skulked in corners and crept about in a sort of noon-day twilight, making himself grey and misty, at all hours, with his morbid intolerance of sunshine.—

*Hawthorne.*

With all that chilling mystery of mein,  
And seeming gladness to remain unseen,  
He had (if 'twere not nature's boon) an art  
Of fixing memory on another's heart.

*"Lara."*

THERE is no prettier sight than a sunset shining through trees.

One glorious July evening saw all the western sky in a purple glow which,

striking slanting rules of crimson through the trees in the grounds, kindled in the windows of the Gray House innumerable blood-red stars, each with a glory that dazzled the eye to behold.

Dr. Fraser sat in his study at the open window watching the heavenly splendour which the trees subdued to his eyes.

All the leaves were edged with gold; the purple radiance fell upon the sward and looked lurid against the deepening shadows. The swallows were cleaving the air with quick cries, and a thrush sang sweetly in one of the highest trees.

There was in the evening, all the tranquillity of night, softening and purifying the vivid beauties of day—a perfect union of the real and the ideal.

The warm light irradiated the room in

which the doctor sat, and disclosed a large and comfortable chamber, furnished as a study, the walls hidden by rows upon rows of books. In the centre was a table covered with papers.

The furniture illustrated an eccentric taste.

Specimens of those ornaments which Goldsmith ridiculed were upon the mantelpiece ; "sprawling dragons, squatting pagods, and clumsy mandarines." There was an ugly clock too : a machine that sent forth a galvanized iron skeleton every hour, a weird resurrection which made time hideous. Behind this clock was a grim and faded picture, a half-figure in armour, sold to the doctor as a real *Salviati*, and manufactured, may be, by Solomons of Wardour-street.

But now came an exhibition of taste : on either side of the mantelpiece were as many of Hogarth's engravings in gilt frames as could be squeezed in.

Over an antique cabinet, which had probably held the jewels or papers of half-a-dozen generations, were hung queer-looking guns, a cross-bow, a shield, sundry arrows, an iron-glove—a worthless armoury—arranged with as much taste as their ferocious character would admit.

In a corner was a table on which were displayed a skull, some fossils, dried fish, fat bottles filled with green liquor and holding freaks of nature, such as a frog with two heads, a kitten with five legs, an animal with a name so long that the paper on which it was written completely

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circled the bottle—a thing with dark eyes and a pair of horns.

The very chairs had an uncommon look as though they had been the work of crazy joiners.

The owner of these and a heap of other rarities which I have not catalogued, sat, with his chin resting upon his hand, gazing at the sunset.

He was a man of about fifty-five years of age, with fine intelligent eyes and white eyebrows, which were shaggy and overhanging. His head was large and finely shaped, the forehead broad and high, the back of the head long and massive, offering abundant accommodation for brains.

His mood is sheerly indolent, and in the absence of self-consciousness his face should be as candid as a sleeper's.



If it be so, we scarcely know how to interpret it. We too willingly acknowledge the intellect of the forehead and the eyes, not to deprecate the qualifying suggestion of fitful and even irritable indecision expressed by the mouth—indeed, by the whole of the lower part of the face.

The jaws are heavy, the under-lip full almost to deformity, the chin an uncertain outline. The neck is thick and short, and balks the eye of the pleasure it would not fail to take in remarking the muscular and symmetrical breadth of the man's chest.

But we inspect him too keenly. Besides, we are no believers in physiognomy.

He is more easily, and perhaps more intelligibly described as a "fine" man: and that he certainly is, let taste quibble

as it will ; for when he rises from his chair he exhibits a figure over six feet high.

By this time the splendour behind the trees had faded ; there was a purple gloom filling the air, soon to be followed by grey twilight.

The doctor's reverie was ended, and, being short-sighted, he stepped over to the mantelpiece to look at the clock.

Just then a bell rang.

He returned to his chair, and in a few moments the door was opened, and a servant entered.

" A gentleman wishes to see you, sir."

" What name ?"

" Mr. Joseph Creed."

" Quite right ; show him in."

The servant withdrew, and presently

introduced a young man, who stood in the doorway and made a low bow.

"Pray come forward, Mr. Creed, and take a seat," said the doctor, and turned to the servant and told her to light the gas.

Mr. Creed, who held his hat behind him, advanced with a sliding movement, and took a low chair, which brought his knees high up ; and on them he balanced his hat.

He looked about thirty years old. His face, which was closely shaved, was long and narrow, and sallow ; his eyes small and black, and he kept them upon the carpet. He had long black hair, parted down the middle and combed behind his ears. He wore high shirt-collars, and around his neck was a black satin stock

ornamented with two pins. His clothes were rather shabby; the frock-coat fitting him ill, varnished about the elbows, the dark pantaloons worn at the heels.

But his shoes were highly polished, his linen clean, and he held a pair of black kid gloves.

"Dr. Bush spoke highly of you, Mr. Creed," said Dr. Fraser.

"He is very good, sir."

"Are you used to literary work?"

"I believe I could make myself useful," replied Creed, raising his eyes, looking at the doctor, then round the room, then fixedly at the carpet.

"I am not a literary man," said the doctor; "but an idler on whom time occasionally presses heavily. I began a book about six months ago—very languidly, I

assure you, for I wanted the stimulus of hunger, the spur of authorcraft. But I like my work now, and wish to finish it."

"May I ask its nature?"

"Why," answered the doctor, with the diffidence of an author naming his unfledged scheme, "it is a History of Milborough."

"A fruitful theme."

"Why, yes; the place is full of historical interest. Take the Castle, for instance. Its traditions related with spirit would contribute a romantic chapter to the book."

"Ay, so they would, sir. I came across a good article in the 'Edinburgh Review' not long since, where the writer says that the historian ought to reclaim the materials

which have been appropriated by the novelist. Then, says he, we should not have to look for the wars and votes of the Puritans in Clarendon and for their phraseology in 'Old Mortality.' "

Having spoken, he looked down at the ground.

"Excellent advice," said the doctor, who little guessed that the theory he applauded was, later on, by its originator, to be illustrated by the most brilliant history in literature. "But to recur to the business between us. I should want you to make extracts from books, and hunt up facts. You could do that?"

"Oh, certainly."

"Bush told me that you wrote a good hand and are a scholar. There is much monkish Latin mixed up in the

books I want to quote, a delectable jargon which you might master more quickly than I. This is as far as I have gone."

He took a manuscript from a drawer, and handed it to Mr. Creed, who put his hat down to take it and read a few lines.

Dr. Fraser watched him, nervously.

"I like the opening," said Creed, after a pause.

"Do you?" answered Fraser, looking pleased.

"I detest what is called the historical style," said Creed, keeping his eyes on the manuscript. "Why should history be written laboriously—in rounded periods—in Johnsonese?"

"There is always a temptation to

copy the example the world admires, though it be false taste. I am not far advanced, as you see. The chapter you hold is merely a preliminary dissertation. Understand me, Mr. Creed, this is merely my diversion," said the doctor, touching the manuscript with his fore-finger. "I prolong the labour for the sake of it. It supplies me with a purpose, and sets me turning the leaves of many an old book I might not otherwise read."

He looked round the room with an air of pride.

In fact, he had some thousands of volumes, many of them big folios in calf or leather, which scented the air with a flavour that took you back in fancy to the days when they were new, and conjured up visions of coffee-houses and wits in bag-



wigs, or pale students in cuffs, or ghostly monks in flannel gowns, with ropes about their middle.

Mr. Creed turned his eyes and took in rapidly, but with an air of great interest, what was visible.

He was more in keeping with the room, and its books and curiosities, than the owner. His gaunt face, his black eyes, at once penetrating and evasive; his chin, and cheeks, and upper lip, shaved to a complexion that was almost livid, somehow added a detail to the oddities that were scattered about, which they appeared to need.

He took a propriety in that fantastic room which he must have lacked in a more homely-ordered apartment. There were faces not unlike his, in some of the

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wonderful engravings on either side the mantelpiece.

He may have felt the kinship, for he rose to inspect them.

Dr. Fraser was well-pleased to exhibit his stores.

Perhaps he had a mind to sound the young man's knowledge, for he directed his attention to books and objects of curiosity in a way that obliged him to converse; and when he spoke the doctor listened shrewdly.

But this was hardly fair: for Mr. Creed was plainly embarrassed and diffident almost to humility.

Still he talked very sensibly, with an evident knowledge of literature, and he knew something of anatomy.

This pleased Dr. Fraser, and caused

him to unbend the somewhat stiff and critical manner he had assumed.

They returned to their chairs, and Dr. Fraser rang for coffee and lighted a pipe, after offering his companion a cigar, which he refused.

There was something so uncommon in Mr. Creed's appearance that it was impossible to watch him without feeling interested in him. The doctor was prejudiced in his favour by his obvious fitness for the duties he wanted him for.

Mr. Creed laid aside his nervousness after a little, and talked without constraint. He had seen life and related his history modestly.

His father had wanted him to be a doctor: but not having the means to furnish him with an education and to help

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him to establish himself, apprenticed him to a chemist in a part of England where the apothecary was not an extinct species, and where Bolus prescribed as well as dispensed.

His father soon after died and left him twenty pounds. Then the chemist failed, and Creed was thrown upon the world to scramble through life as best he might.

He had never cared for medicine as a profession, and when he ought to have been studying the nature of drugs, was reading in Greek and Latin books, a self-taught scholar, and practising English composition.

He owned that his ambition was to distinguish himself in literature: but he found employment hard to obtain and when obtained badly paid: there were

thousands in the field, most of whom were disappointed : there was consequently great bitterness and hostility, and he discovered that there was scarcely any crime a man could commit which should excite so much hatred and abuse as the crime of writing a book. So, as he was starving, he applied for the place of assistant-usher at a cheap school near York, where he lived for three years in great misery, and was several times in danger of dying of hunger, and then came south to obtain the post at Dr. Bush's school which he now filled.

That was his history, he said ; not a very eventful one, but it had taught him that life was a hard battle.

He smiled and sipped his coffee, holding the saucer well under the cup, his legs crossed and his eyes roaming.

"Bush told me that you sleep out. Your evenings are your own then?" said the doctor.

"Yes, sir; after six o'clock."

"Suppose you come to me three times a week."

"I should be very happy."

"About terms?"

Mr Creed named a modest sum.

"Oh you may double that, certainly," exclaimed the doctor.

Creed's eyes gleamed.

"Consider, the post is no sinecure," continued the doctor. "Neither could I require your services for any length of time."

"I am very sensible of your kindness," said Mr. Creed.

So it was settled that Mr. Creed should come three times a week.

If he could pick up any local traditions of interest, Dr. Fraser would be obliged, and would take care to compensate him for what work he did outside the prescribed routine.

There was a legend of a well having existed where the town-hall stands, of which the waters had been blessed by a certain saint and endowed with rare healing powers. Dr. Fraser was anxious to discover the name the well bore, also the names of the diseases its waters cured.

This would supply him with an excuse to introduce a chapter on the subject of healing waters, with particular reference to the moral influence of superstition as a hygienic agency.

The pathologist, he thought, should incline a kindly ear to the dim utterances

of the mediæval leech. Psychology entered largely into the healing arts : but the modern Scientist, whose natural disposition to a somewhat heartless materialism is hardened by successive physiological discoveries, recklessly scouts the idea of that moral treatment of disease by which most of the recorded cures would appear to have been effected in the middle and in later ages also.

Had Mr. Creed ever looked into Kenelm Digby's Tracts ? they were worth studying. The Montpelier Discourse involves a theory we may smile at, but should not disdain, bearing in mind the genius of the exponent and the power of sympathy.\*

\* This is mere fatuity. Digby professed to have obtained the secret of the Sympathetic Power from a



Ashmole and Glanvill too, abound in quaint remedial dreams. Old Bulleyne was a great favourite with him (Fraser). Take his fantastic "Book of Compounds" and "Government of Health." It was instructive and suggestive to remark the old sixteenth century surgeon blundering upon valuable psychological remedies amid his references to the most extravagantly superstitious cures. His works and those of a dozen others of the same

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priest who learnt it in China. You dissolved this powder in water: and the water then possessed a sympathetic healing virtue, so that, if a man had a wounded arm, say, by dipping the bandage that covered his wound into the water containing the powder, the wound would be healed. This nonsense was plainly expounded by Digby at Montpellier and obtained great credit. Lord Bacon believed in the healing virtues of sympathy. The genuine drug is too scarce now-a-days for experiments.

quality were on those lower shelves there.

Mr. Creed would have to make many transcripts from their pages.

"I shall like the work sir," said Creed.

Dr. Fraser had talked himself into good spirits. He was pleased with the attentive young man with the keen eyes and the long face, full enough of expression to mark with its changes a complete appreciation of the doctor's opinions.

There was nobody in Milborough Fraser knew to talk to freely except Bush and the old literary man. Heads were bovine, brains agricultural in that district.

Besides, Mr. Creed was a listener who made his attention a compliment.

He looked applause without speaking,

and often appeared struck ; which is sweet flattery to the declaimer.

When he went away they had been an hour together.

Fraser was quite cordial as he said good-bye.

## CHAPTER IV.

LOUIS HADDON.

*Lambson.* ' " My dearest Louisa, why do you refer me to your father? you know what that kind of reference means. He hums and haws. I look like a fool. He talks of marriage-settlements whilst I try to look wise, and wonder what settlement is to be made out of a hundred pounds a year! Why can't a man fall in love without being referred to Papa. Good gracious! who *is* Papa?—" *All for Gold.*"

DR. FRASER returned to his study after accompanying Mr. Creed to the hall door, and put his manuscript carefully away in the drawer he had taken it from.

He then crossed the hall and entered a room that was nearly dark.

"No light here!" he exclaimed, halting.

"Helen, where are you?"

"Here, papa."

A figure rose near the window and stood out in relief against the sky beyond.

At the same moment another and a masculine voice said,

"How do you do, Dr. Fraser?"

"Is that you, Haddon? I can't see you. It seems absurd to be polite in the dark."

Saying which the doctor fumbled in his pocket, produced a match-box, and pulling down the chandelier, lighted the gas.

At the window stood a young girl, looking shyly, with averted head, at the doctor. Near her stood a young man, who, when

the doctor had done with the chandelier, came forward and shook his hand.

"I have been here half an hour," said he. "Miss Fraser told me you were engaged."

"Ay," said the doctor, seating himself. "I have been enjoying a long conversation with a clever young fellow, named Creed, an usher at Bush's school. I have engaged him, Helen."

Helen, who looked rather confused, answered, "I hope he will suit you, papa," and seated herself at some distance from Mr. Haddon.

She was Dr. Fraser's daughter, a sweet-looking girl of twenty. I say sweet-looking, which properly characterises a face that owed much of its charm to its expression.

To image her, you must conceive a perfectly feminine face, pale and thoughtful; a little Greek nose, with nostrils most delicate; brown eyes, not large, but soft, pensive, and full of gentleness; a calm white forehead, over which the hair of auburn, threaded with lines of clear gold, fell in wavy outline.

Her figure was very graceful; every movement of it infused by the gentleness that shone in her soft eyes.

You recognised at a glance the perfect lady.

Her father looked at her as she spoke, and then turned to Haddon, a fresh-complexioned young man, with large honest blue eyes, and fair hair and whiskers.

If he felt any embarrassment, he showed none; for he returned the doctor's gaze

with a pleasant smile, disclosing by this some very white teeth, which did not a little improve his agreeable face.

"You are still bent on writing your book, Dr. Fraser," he said.

"Oh, yes. And this evening Mr. Creed has freshened up my interest in it. I doubt if I could have found a more suitable person. He is very clever, and no egotist. He is modest, too. He named a very low sum for his services, which, out of honest compassion, I doubled."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed Helen. "I dare say he receives a very small salary from Dr. Bush."

She looked at her father after she had spoken, as one might who fears to be thought intrusive.

"That's only a supposition, Helen; and



we mustn't waste our sympathies on fancies. What do you think, Haddon?"

"Are such fancies wrong?" answered Haddon, smiling at Helen.

"In what sense? Morally wrong, or wrong in fact?"

What was the difference? Surely to be morally wrong, is to be wrong in fact—not in fiction. But Fraser loved a quibble.

"In either sense. But I meant in fact. I see many troubles wherever I go—troubles I really don't think I should believe had an existence, had I not seen their effect with my own eyes."

"I don't quite understand," said Fraser.

"Take this instance—Jennings, the carpenter. Do you know him?"

"Yes; he has worked for me."

"You will always hear him whistling

over his bench, and I thought him a happy man, until I called with Mr. Morgan at his house. There I found that he had a deformed and ailing child—a miserable poor child, who never went out—over whom he cried to us when he said what grief and pain the little creature's helplessness gave him."

He added, after a pause,

"I think we are right to sympathize, even on supposition. Every man has a trouble that entitles him to our sympathy."

Dr. Fraser crossed his legs, and said,

"Clergymen, of course, should take sorrowful views of life. They are no doubt right. I suppose you are now an adept at parish work?"

"There is much to learn."

"Is it wholesome knowledge?" asked

the doctor, suddenly. "You are a very young man ; all your sympathies, all your aspirations, should be towards what is bright, and graceful, and happy. Are you then acting fairly to yourself in dealing only with the sorrowful aspects of life ?"

"I wish to follow my Master's footsteps," answered Haddon, gently. "His example suffices me. I should not be worthy of my own ambition, if I did not train my heart for the duties I hope to enter upon."

"How long is your probation to last ?" said Fraser, touched by the young fellow's gentle answer.

"Some months yet."

"It is entirely self-imposed ?"

"Entirely. But you can understand that when I am ordained, I could wish to

know what to do. I shall be Mr. Morgan's curate, as you know, and desire to learn the habits and feelings of the poor of his parish before I formally come among them."

"You have kept your ten terms; and at Cambridge, I believe, they work you harder than they do at Oxford. Many would consider that probation enough, and think themselves abundantly qualified for the ministry by an acquaintance with the Fathers and Mosheim. Well, I like to see earnestness, no matter what the ambition, so it be honourable. It is plain that you like your vocation by the hearty manner in which you are graduating; and the beginning of anything is bound to be auspicious that is begun with relish and fervour."

"Learning parish work," . . . he exclaimed, almost to himself, after a pause, looking at Haddon, and stopped short.

He was fond of arguing on religion, and it was a mighty temptation to begin a discussion when he was face to face with an ardent believer.

But there was something in Haddon—perhaps his youth, perhaps his sincerity—that invariably checked the doctor's desire, and kept him quiet.

All this time Helen was listening, without offering to put in a word. For the most part, she kept her eyes fixed on her father's face.

Haddon looked at her for some moments, until their eyes met. She gave him a shy and troubled smile, and reverted to her father.

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Haddon made a movement as if to leave.

“Are you going?” asked Dr. Fraser.

“I was thinking——” began Haddon.

“Nonsense. Stop and drink tea with us. What time is it? Twenty minutes past eight. Ring the bell, Helen.”

She did so instantly.

“Come, Haddon, this is a feint. You never called to leave in such a hurry.”

Haddon smiled.

“No ; that is quite true,” he answered. “I called to have a talk with you. But I hardly like to weary you, after the long conversation you have had with Mr. Creed.”

“Oh, I shall be very happy,” said Fraser, looking suddenly at his daughter, and

bending his eyes downwards with a little smile.

Helen caught his glance, and coloured up, and, to hide her confusion, turned to a side-table, and pretended to arrange some flowers.

It was charming to watch the unconscious grace of her attitude, her inclined figure, the delicate outline of her extended arm revealed through the transparent muslin sleeve.

"What time do you wish to return home?" inquired Dr. Fraser.

"I am not pressed for time," answered Haddon.

"Then when we have done tea, we will have our chat in the study. I am at home among my books, and can smoke, to which I know you have no objection."

Soon after this the servant brought in the tea. Helen seated herself opposite the urn, and Haddon drew near to her, whilst the doctor lay back on the sofa.

The scene was a cosy one.

The bright gas-light—a luxury in country houses in those days, and which had been introduced into the Gray House by the doctor at a great expense—shone upon the cheerful table, and made a bright reflection in the big looking-glass against the chimney. There were paintings hung round the walls which did credit to the owner's taste; and pretty ornaments on the mantelpiece, quite unlike the convulsed pieces of crockery which decorated the study.

The window was open : a great whirring moth came in out of the darkness, and



slapped the ceiling; the high trees lifted their peaceful heads outside, and over them bent the mid-summer night sky, peaceful with stars.

Dr. Fraser watched his daughter with half closed eyes as from time to time Haddon bent forward and addressed her.

Presently she rose and wheeled a little table to his side, and brought him a cup of tea and kissed him.

The action was striking, by reason of the marked air of veneration with which it was performed. A courtier kisses the sovereign's hand as Helen kissed her father.

He just smiled his thanks for her attention and she returned to the table. But faint as his smile was, it satisfied her. One might have thought that she was used

to no recognition at all to remark the pleasure in her eyes as she resumed her chair.

Whilst they drank tea the doctor sometimes put in a word, but chiefly left the conversation to Haddon and his daughter—at least what there was of it, for Helen spoke little and watched her father frequently.

A new impulse had been given him, as himself had confessed, by Mr. Creed; and all his thoughts ran on books and Milborough antiquities. He wished Haddon had been a book-man, that he might have folded his legs and talked the evening out on no other subject than his history.

But [that was his want. All the Milborough people were uncongenial in this respect, he thought, on no better testimony

than the sneers of Bush and the contempt of Rodgers, the old man of letters. Haddon, who had read, cared little about the books the doctor liked, and could kindle no enthusiasm by appreciation of the subtleties and aromas of fine poets and writers. He loved theology: not in a book sense, but for the glorious truths it unveiled and expounded.

But the doctor relished only the vehicle, not the matter : loved the quaintness, or delicacy, or strength, of the diction, not the teaching, which indeed he disputed not as an infidel, but as a free-thinker holding to certain first truths, but denying many of the deductions.

When half an hour had gone, the doctor said,

“Now Haddon, will you join me in the

study ?” and stood at the door to let the young man pass.

His eyes met his daughter’s, she coloured up, and smiled brightly, pleased to be noticed : and when the door was closed regarded it wistfully.

“Take that chair,” said the Doctor, brightening the gas and quickening into momentary convulsions the ugly furniture of the mantelpiece, by the leaping up of the flame.

“You have a grand display of books,” said Haddon, looking round the room.

“Why, yes,” answered the doctor : “but the larger part of them have been collected since I have been here. Do you see that pile of pamphlets by the lower shelf there ? They are booksellers’ catalogues.”

He smiled and lighted a pipe, complacently surveying the book-shelves before sitting down.

"Now, Haddon, my boy, you have some thing to tell me."

"It is about Helen, Dr. Fraser."

"Ay."

"You know I love her," said the young fellow, flushing up, but looking straight with his honest eyes at the other's face.

"How should I?" rejoined Dr. Fraser with a laugh. "That can be known only to yourself—nay, and to her."

"Oh, but you can tell that I am sincere. I love her fondly, Dr. Fraser. She is the sweetest and dearest girl, so gentle, so womanly——"

"Yes, she is a good girl. She has some of her dear mother's qualities. I recognise

that of sweetness particularly. But is she not too young to marry?"

He asked the question in such a way that it might have concerned a stranger.

"We wish to be betrothed, with your sanction."

"And when would you marry?" asked the doctor curiously, as though he wished to study an aspect of human nature that was new to him.

"After I am ordained. The curacy of which Mr. Morgan has promised me the title, will be worth a hundred and twenty a year, and I have two hundred of my own. I could support Helen on that sum, and what is more, she will be near you, which makes her happy to think."

"You fancy you could live on three hundred and twenty a year, which, if you

are popular, your parishioners would make four hundred with gifts, I daresay," remarked Dr. Fraser, after a pause, during which he had closely watched Haddon under his shaggy white eyebrows. "And in this programme you put my name down with a naught against it."

"I have never thought of you with reference to anything but your sanction. If you will give me Helen, you will give me all I want."

"A truly generous lover, Haddon! quite unlike the ordinary run, I promise you, who ask papa's sanction, not because it is wanted, but that he may not be angry and cut his daughter off."

He laughed and added. "Why do you want to marry?"

"Because I love Helen."

"Let me see. You have known her, how long?"

"Two years."

"Is it possible? two years! how the time flies! And have you loved her all this time?"

"I think I have," Haddon answered thoughtfully. "I admired her when I first saw her, and I loved her soon after I met her. But it is only latterly that I have ventured to speak of my love."

The window was wide open. Dr. Fraser leaned forwards and looked upwards, and there was a short silence.

The peace in the air was indescribable. The stars winked among the branches of the trees, and the rich smell of the clematis beneath the window sweetened the air and



mingled its breath with the aroma of mould moist with dew.

“Are you wise in wishing to marry?” the doctor asked, contracting his brows thoughtfully, but speaking kindly. “Some think that clergymen cannot fulfil their duties who are bound to the temporal interests of wife and children. Love for these will deter them from actions which, were they alone in the world, would involve nothing but self sacrifice. Sickness will scare them, lest they bring disease and death home to those they love dearer than all other of their fellow creatures.”

“No, it would not scare me. After a hard day’s work it would be my happiness to come home to her. I have concealed nothing from her, Dr. Fraser,” said Had-

don earnestly. "I have told her what her duties will be as a clergyman's wife—how she can sustain and perfect my efforts . . ."

"Yes, yes," interrupted the doctor, dropping his chin on his hand and looking downwards, "but there are other considerations than parochial ones to determine you. If you love her tenderly, think,—you may lose her. My heart's blood went from me when my wife died. I shall never be the man I was."

His voice faltered.

"The affections take deep root in natures like yours. Dear interests grow about them to make their grasp upon the mind tenacious. When they are torn up, God knows the life-blood that is shed. We have selfish claims enough to render this world dear to us; dreadful to part

with. Why do we forge new bonds to connect us to what we know is not permanent—to make the least of our living joys the germ of a certain pang?”

His thoughts wandered to his dead wife, and he turned his eyes up to the stars.

There was such another night as that—with stars as bright, and trees as visionary, and the perfume of flowers as sweet—in his memory, when two of them stood upon a lawn, looking upwards and speaking in soft whispers.

How many years ago!

The face that was dead now, was fair and young then, the eyes filled with pensive happiness and reflecting the same stars that were shining among the trees yonder.

“But, but about your engagement now,”

he said, changing his manner and letting his voice take a lighter tone : " I am prone to moralise on important occasions, and am thus led away from the business in hand. Have you spoken to Lady Haddon ?"

" Not yet," answered Haddon, looking suddenly embarrassed.

" That's where it is," said the doctor, noticing the look. " If she refuses her consent, what is the use of mine ?"

" Oh, but Dr. Fraser, my mother will love Helen when she knows her well. Just now she might refuse her sanction, because of a cousin of mine, Clara Vane, who lives near Cambridge, and whose family has some church patronage. Clara's uncle is Lord Torchester. He has the gift of three livings : and my mother thinks of me when she talks of Clara."

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"Quite natural that she should," said the doctor, suppressing a little yawn.

"But," continued Haddon quickly, "though I am very fond of my mother, I should not allow her to come between Helen and me. She will think, as all mothers do, that she is a better judge of my happiness than I am ; but she is mistaken. I will prove to her she is mistaken, if she supposes that any woman but Helen could make me happy. I should prize your sanction for Helen's sake. She would not lift a finger in opposition to your wishes."

"If she is willing to marry you, I can make no objection."

This the doctor said with an air of indifference; but Haddon missed the coldness of the words in the pleasure they gave him.

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He jumped up and shook the doctor's hand with a flushed face and bright eyes.

"Now," said the doctor, laughing, "I have performed my share, haven't I? Don't stop with me—you would rather be with Helen."

Haddon would have thanked him again, but he cut him short by saying :

"Your mother will want to quarrel with me for my ready consent that opposes her plans. But then I have not the pleasure of an intimate acquaintance with Lady Haddon, and so do not incur great risks, do I? You must fight my battles, Haddon, if any come of this. And now, my boy, go and tell Helen the news."

The doctor's tone and manner as he said

this are not easily described. His air of levity filled his words with a suggestion of indifference ; but then this was qualified by a pleasant smile.

## CHAPTER V.

### YOUNG LOVE.

“With every morn their love grew tenderer,  
With every eve deeper and tenderer still :  
He might not in house, field, or garden stir ,  
But her full shape would all his seeing fill :  
And his continual voice was pleasanter  
To her than noise of trees or hidden rill.”

KEATS.

“When the Christian binds himself by vows to a religious life, he makes a surrender to Him who is all-perfect and whom he may unreservedly trust. Moreover, looking at that surrender on its human side, he has the safeguard of distinct *provisos* and regulations, and of the principles of theology, to secure him against tyranny on the part of his superiors. But what shall



be his encouragement to make himself over, without condition or stipulation, as an absolute property, to a fallible being ; and that not for a season, but for life ?”  
—*Callista*, by J. H. NEWMAN.

HADDON left the room and the doctor took a book and began to read.

After ten minutes the door was opened very gently.

The doctor, interrupted in a passage on which he was intent, looked up annoyed, and saw his daughter.

She came forward timidly, and kissed his forehead.

“ Oh, papa, thank you for your consent.”

“ It is very well,” he replied. “ The boy is your choice. If you marry him you will have a gentleman for your husband, which is everything. No woman is safe—no human being is safe—with anybody but

a gentleman. I don't like his brother and mother, but that is no matter."

His eyes reverted to the book.

She stood a moment watching him as if she would speak ; but seeing that he did not raise his eyes, walked lightly to the door ; there stopped and looked back.

He glanced at her and smiled. A wonderful expression of affection came into her face, her eyes softened and lingered upon him.

Then so noiselessly that he knew not but that she was still watching him, she closed the door and returned to her lover.

He was at the open window ; she went and stood by his side.

This window faced the high road, and just over the hedge they could see the small yellow lights burning in the windows

of distant houses, or in street lamps, showing where Milborough lay.

"You have not been long, dearest," Louis said, looking at the pale face which the faint starlight made dreamlike.

"I kissed and thanked him," she answered. "I never care to disturb him when he is in his study. Oh, Louis, how clever, how noble he is! how passionately mamma must have loved him! Do you think there are many men in the world like papa?"

"He is very clever, and I am sure he is good, also," he said tenderly. "But is he not a little cold—to you—it may be my fancy? I cannot imagine any one not loving you, and taking delight in watching you and feeling the pleasure in your sweetness which one takes in violets and all sweet-smelling flowers."

“Oh no, he is not cold,” she exclaimed.  
“He does love me, Louis. But then I am not clever enough for him. Sometimes he speaks and I do not understand him, though I strain all my mind to do so, and I know that appreciation pleases him. Is he not good to consent to our engagement? He smiled when I left him just now, and I cannot describe how grateful his smile always makes me, how it raises and seems to bless me. His book will be wonderful when it is finished. What would I give if he would read me what he has written! Have you heard it?”

“No.”

“He will read it to you some day, for I know he thinks highly of you. Oh, Louis, he said that if I married you I should have a gentleman for a husband.”

Is not that great praise? I would rather have heard him say that than the richest flattery of you from another. Don't think he is cold to me, dearest. It grieves me that you should fancy so. I am so far removed from him in talent, that only his love could prompt him to speak of me as he does."

Here was a sublime devotion, an error sanctified by the qualities that gave it life, which Louis would have felt it sacrilege to disturb.

He kissed her forehead and began to talk to her of their life when they should be married.

He grew enthusiastic in speaking of the duties of his vocation.

Her sweetness would win converts for him. He pictured her entering dissolute

homes and smiling Gospel-light with her eyes upon the darkness within; rebuking evil by her gentle aspect, illustrating the value, the efficacy, the fruitfulness of faith by her own abundant sacrifices; feeding and clothing the poor; gathering ignorant men and children to his fold; giving hope and courage to the heavily burdened.

She hung upon his words and watched him as he spoke wistfully, as if her spirit were striving to antedate that gracious time when, with one heart, and hand in hand, they should go forth to do their Master's bidding.

So exalted was their love rendered by the high and noble resolves that shaped and directed it, that it were scarcely a fantasy to conceive the night, so absolutely tranquil that the lightest leaf-fall was

audible, holding its breath that it might hear them.

Has not Nature her moods of sympathy with human passions ?

The poets at least have always witnessed the need of them.

When the veil is drawn from the altar of the heart which burns in the service of its Maker, we could wish, we could expect the serenest sky to mingle its light with that spiritual radiance ; and to such converse as the young lovers then held, there could scarcely be a fitter audience than the stars which symbolise, if they do not prefigure, the stainless purity of the angelic host.

A question from Helen broke the spell that was upon them both, and summoned one of the lovers at least from the paradise of visions in which he was living.

“What will your mother say, Louis, when you tell her that we are engaged?”

“There will be a difficulty there,” he answered. “But I have always foreseen it, and am prepared for it. I must be resolute. It is painful to oppose her wishes, but I know and feel that my cause is a good one—that the mistake is hers, and that she will live to know it. And I could tell her this—that though I should sacrifice you for her sake, which will never be, I could not marry my cousin.”

“I would make your mother love me when I was your wife, Louis.”

“Yes, and so you could before you are my wife, were it not for the prejudice she has taken on no other ground than that I spend some of my time here. No, it is not possible to be honourable and good if



one is not just. There is no reason that my mother could name why I should not marry you. You are the most fitted of all the women in this world to be my wife. Were your father the poorest of men you would only be the dearer to me. I want nothing but your own precious self. I look into your gentle eyes and adore the spirit I witness there—the strength, the faithfulness, the purity which will all be my needs when I begin my work.”

He clasped her to him and continued, “You see my mother’s scheme is entirely worldly. She believes that were I to marry Clara I should obtain a good living from Lord Torchester, and a tolerable fortune which her father has promised her on her marriage day. These are Clara’s advantages. These are to compensate her hus-

band for her worldliness, her indifference to—no! she has many good qualities; she is generous and frank and honest; but her training has not fitted her to be a clergyman's wife."

"And you think mine has?" Helen asked with a smile.

"Yes. But let us talk of my mother, dearest, a little while longer, for I must be leaving you soon. I am thinking whilst I speak, what to do. Shall I tell my mother that I am now engaged to you with your father's sanction, or shall I keep the secret for the present? I will wait. Something may happen."

"What?"

"Oh, I can't tell. Perhaps she will change her mind about Clara and think I could find a better wife."

"Yes, that might happen; but might she think I will make a better wife?"

"She must know that already. Everybody loves you. I heard Mr. Morgan telling her the other day how many of his poor blessed you, for that you were constantly stealing into their little homes with gifts and kind words, and making them happy. My mother looked at me quickly and I smiled. I tell you it made me proud that my darling should be so well praised."

"What will your brother Horace say?"

"Oh, I put Horace aside. He would marry Clara himself if she would have him, but that will not be. Imagine his wanting me to enter that family because of the influence I could use to get him a Government position! I wish he were provided for. I wish he would leave Milborough."

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Helen was silent. She always knew this brother's conduct to be a great grief to Louis, who rarely spoke of him.

"I think we must keep our secret for the present," said Louis. "I will watch for an opportunity to break the news to my mother; and meanwhile," he added, kissing her, "we may be perfectly happy in the knowledge that we wholly and truly belong to each other."

"Wholly and truly, dear Louis," she answered, looking up at him with fond eyes.

He went away soon after this, and Helen took her work-basket and sewed until ten o'clock alone; after which, her father came in and sat with her.

He asked her if Louis had left, and then briefly adverted to her engagement, with-

out mentioning Lady Haddon's name, or speaking as if his feelings were at all concerned in his child's happiness; but as a stranger might, whose politeness sees the need of reference to a topic that does not interest him.

He brought a book with him from the study, and read uninterruptedly until Helen rose to kiss him and say good night.

Clearly the smallest favours from her father satisfied her; and the "good night" he gave her sent her from the room pleased as if the whole evening had been dedicated by him to earnest and loving discussion of the new and critical future that had suddenly opened upon her.

## CHAPTER VI.

### MR. CREED'S FIRST VISIT.

"THERE is nothing truer, I believe, than physiognomy, taken in connection with manner. The art of reading that book of which Eternal Wisdom obliges every human creature to present his or her own page with the individual character written on it, is a difficult one, perhaps, and is little studied. I confess, for my part, that I have been taken in over and over and over again. I have been taken in by acquaintances, and I have been taken in (of course) by friends—far oftener by friends than by any other class of persons. How came I to be so deceived? Had I quite misread their faces? No, believe me; my first impression of those people, founded on face and manner alone, was invariably true. My mistake was, in suffering them to come nearer to me and explain themselves away."—  
CHARLES DICKENS.

Two evenings after this, Mr. Creed

came to the Gray House at seven o'clock.

Dr. Fraser still lingered at the dinner-table when he was announced, and bade the servant show him into the dining-room.

Helen rose and went to the window, and took some work in her hand ; and then Mr. Creed came in, bowing low to her and the doctor.

The appearance of the room struck him, and perhaps he contrasted it with his own single bed-room over the hair-dresser's shop in Market Street, with the turn-up bedstead, the soiled and worn felt carpet, the coloured counterpane, and the flue everywhere.

The sun had sunk behind the trees at the back of the house, but its crimson was upon the air, and there was enough light

to exhibit objects with an indistinctness that gave them ideality.

This was especially the case with Helen, whose gentle and womanly aspect was in perfect keeping with the solemn evening light.

There was wine and fruit upon the table, and before them sat the doctor, looking well the part of a comfortable English gentleman, who enjoyed life, and had a deep sense of what was worth having in it.

"Pray be seated, Mr. Creed," said he, with the blandness he could assume when it pleased him, but which he rarely assumed out of his own house. "Can I offer you a glass of wine? Here is some excellent port; or will you try the sherry, or the claret? I can recommend them all."



Mr. Creed, with his eyes on the floor, and looking overpowered, chose the port, and stole a quick glance at Helen.

She was watching him; but when their eyes met she smiled winningly.

"Bush and I," said the doctor, helping himself to sherry, "often dine together, and I want no better company. He knows men as well as books, and I take him to be a sound scholar. What do you think?"

"Oh, there can be no doubt of his acquirements."

"He is too able a man to be a school-master. He must lose a great deal of self-pride for want of recognition. How should boys appreciate learning? And is there anything more tedious than to have to retrace, day after day, the alphabet of

knowledge, as Bush must in teaching his scholars. I sometimes think of old Dr. Johnson as a schoolmaster. I see him bringing his immense sagacity, his copious learning, his wonderful memory, to bear upon the pin's-head of a pupil's mind—powers prodigious enough to revolutionise English literature exerted to break a butterfly. Figure a profound Latinist spelling through Corderius! It would be as though such a man as Brodie, or Laurence, or Crampton, should be set to treat nothing but summer catarrhs. There is Rodgers—do you know him?"

"Slightly. He has been a hard worker."

"Yes. His mind is encyclopædic. An old battered man of letters, who has edited a dozen newspapers, who has written fifty

books, and now decays here in obscurity, with scarcely enough money in his pocket to give him a nightly glass of toddy! You may moralise literature on such a text as that old man. They call literature one of the liberal professions, I think. Good heavens! what irony. Is there a pursuit that teems with more prejudices? is there a pursuit in which success challenges more hatred, and failure more obloquy? Which think you is the worse man : he who kicks his wife to death, or he who writes a bad book? I read a newspaper the other day in which were two articles : one against a man who had killed his wife by kicking her, and one against a man who had written an indifferent novel ; and I give you my word that the language of the writer who dealt with the wife-killer was

temperate, and even courteous, compared with the language of the reviewer. But I was speaking of old Rodgers. He is a famous talker, isn't he, Helen ?"

"Yes, papa, and appreciative," Helen answered.

"I don't suppose you find many persons in the society here to your taste, sir ?" said Mr. Creed, placing his empty wine-glass on the table and wiping his mouth with a pocket-handkerchief which he rolled up like a ball and hid in the palm of his hand.

"Let me give you some more wine, Mr. Creed."

"Thank you, sir, no more."

"There is not a soul in the place I care about," exclaimed Fraser filling his glass and leaning back in his chair in evident enjoyment of the conversation. "I may

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do the people an injustice, I have kept them at bay. My books are company enough for me, and men like Rodgers and Bush, who can understand my tastes. To speak the truth, I would rather consort with mechanics than with the gentry, as they term themselves, here. There is something to be got from an artizan—sometimes much, sometimes little, but always something. Get him to talk of his trade : your tact must make him sink his self-consciousness. Then you will get pure human nature. His pride lies away from your sympathies—it never bothers you. He will talk of his food, his rent, his wife, his shifts, his struggles, his tools, the treatment he receives, and all the time he is illustrating pure life. But your gentleman—your General This or Sir John

T'other—talks from the surface : whispers out of bubbles : conveys nothing, suggests nothing, and bores you ineffably. I saw enough of society when I was in my profession. I had to do what I need do no longer. I suppose an actor washes his face with great enjoyment of soap and water when he has done with his part and goes home to his pipe and his wife. Would you have him drink from gilded goblets behind the scenes and frown, or smile, or smite his bosom as though the stalls were in full stare and the gallery open-mouthed !”

He laughed, and so did Mr. Creed.

“I have done with theatricals,” the doctor went on, emptying his glass and fingering the decanter as if he meditated

another draught, whilst Helen stopped her sewing to look at him. "There is peace to be got here, and nature," turning his eyes upon the window, "and freedom. I can do as I please, I stroll into the road in an old hat, an old coat, unembarrassed by the sense that I am walking in the Public Eye. I am done with actors and acting : and so am willing to give offence rather than turn my house into a stage for the performance of tiresome mockeries."

He took some more wine : and it seemed to Mr. Creed that Helen's face grew anxious as she watched him.

Mr. Creed had yet to find out that Dr. Fraser was an excitable man, easily growing warm, energetic, and sometimes even unpleasantly candid in conversation, and

who would drink freely on occasion, because he found that wine loosened his tongue and gave him ideas.

Mr. Creed waited a few moments to see if the doctor meant to continue speaking : and then said,—

“ I forgot to ask you the other night, sir, if you knew—” and he mentioned a tradition associated with a very old tavern that faced the river.

“ No, I am told this for the first time,” answered the doctor eagerly. “ Is it so ? Can it be verified ? ”

“ It is no doubt as true as most historical facts.”

“ We must note it down,” cried the doctor. “ There is the germ of a fine romance in it. But come ! we cannot see each other's face. Shall we go to work ? ”



Mr. Creed rose with alacrity.

The doctor finished his wine and walked to the door.

Mr. Creed made his peculiar bow to Helen and followed.

Left alone Helen rang the bell, and a servant came and removed the dessert.

She went to the window and stood there lost in thought. There was much to make her thoughtful now ; but she did not immediately think of Louis, but of the man her father had engaged to help him in his book.

She was too generous and too large-hearted to be susceptible of a direct antipathy to one of whom she knew no ill, and whose poverty made out a claim for him upon her kindness ; and yet it must be owned that in thinking of Mr. Creed, she

found herself meditating his aspect and manners with a feeling that very closely resembled distrust.

His downlook troubled her ; she would in vain have attempted to define the prejudice it excited ; she only knew that she dwelt upon it with a misgiving which must have owed its origin to a penetration that pierced deeper than the surface of a purely physical habit.

His manner too, was obsequious in a degree that was suggestive of forced humility.

It was strange that this unfavourable impression should have been made upon her, seeing that Mr. Creed had scarcely spoken during his brief stay in the room, and that he had moved only to take the wine-glass and return it to the table.

But then, we know that a hair will disclose the hiding place of a tiger.

Perhaps Mr. Creed's speech and movements were pregnant, and spoke, in epitome, a salutary caution to the delicate instincts of the girl.

There was the gloom of the evening in the room when he had entered it, and in that gloom his long and sallow face, the little eyes that leapt from object to object, finding no repose until they were lodged upon the ground, the straight black hair swept behind the ears, the angular figure and the long arms with fingers out of proportion to the hand, may have taken a certain fantastic colouring, and assumed a deformity that did not really belong to them.

But such deformity, however produced,

would necessarily influence a first impression, and mingle its grotesque outline with the spiritual qualities of the man, so that the revelation of the twilight would operate like a disagreeable discovery.

But this was not all.

She followed him in fancy to the study, and there beheld him seated amid the strange objects which formed her father's collection, of which she had always a secret horror, such as one should expect in a lover of all that was beautiful and delicate and chaste in nature.

The strange face, painted uncouthly by the evening shadows, took a peculiar significance in her mind from the idea of the unlovely objects with which it was surrounded.

There was the skull, for instance ; its

diabolical grin writhing a bitter sarcastic meaning about the sad and solemn homily it preached : a thing which no familiarity could render tolerable to her mind, over which she had mused with many involuntary shudders, suffering her lonely imagination to run riot and endow it with a human voice which it lifted up to tell what it had been when it lived, what hopes and pains, what joys and griefs, had forced tears from its empty eyes or laughter from its gaping mouth : what it had done in life : what it now knew in death.

Here at least was one detail that got mixed up somehow in the impression she had received from Mr. Creed.

It was the will of imagination that, though he should be surrounded by all bright and cheerful conditions, she should

not be able to think of him but as the central and conspicuous feature of the doctor's gloomy collection, drawing obnoxious interest, such as a skeleton rather than a living man should take, from the ugly and dusty memorials accumulated there.

## CHAPTER VII.

### IN THE STUDY.

“Powers there are  
That touch each other to the quick—in modes  
Which the gross world no sense hath to perceive,  
No soul to dream of.”

WORDSWORTH.

HELEN'S fancy could scarcely have lasted perhaps with any force, had she but peeped into the study.

The gaslight made the room brilliant, and the uncouth figures on the mantelpiece seemed to wink as though dazzled with the blaze.

Dr. Fraser, holding a big meerschaum pipe, the smoke from which drifted slowly in spiral coils through the window, sat in his comfortable arm-chair near the table, supporting his head on his arm, and watching Mr. Creed, who looked through a small pile of books, from time to time glancing from their pages to some manuscript notes in the doctor's hand-writing.

It was quite edifying to observe the solemnity of these initial proceedings.

You would have been almost afraid to guess the ponderous and important nature of the book that demanded the absorbed attention of Mr. Creed and the earnest, not to say triumphant, gaze with which the doctor honoured him.

The work could scarcely, you might have conceived, have been anything of



less weight than a complete rendering of the books of the Talmud into English, or a collation of the Pythagorean philosophy with the Arabian Nights Entertainments, or a new English Dictionary which was to settle the national tongue on immutable bases, and leave it impervious to the inspirations of poets and novelists.

Alas! it was of no more consequence than a compilation of local antiquities and traditions; but then the doctor was in love with his subject, he had taken trouble and spent money in obtaining books referring to it; he had puzzled labourers in the field, the sexton in the churchyard, the oldest inhabitant in his garret, with questions: he had groped his way into dingy houses in order to gather for the fictions (historical certainties to him: en-

thusiasm is cock-sure of everything) with which they were associated, the colouring that should render them life-like : he had climbed Canmore Hill, no easy task, that he might have Milborough at his feet and inspect it as a map.

And now that, after a good many months of thinking and reading and note-taking and questioning, he was about to begin his book in earnest, we are bound to sympathise with, not deride, his enthusiasm : and make up our minds to think that his labours will be to the full as important and valuable as those of various other authors, on no consideration to be named.

Mr. Creed read with knitted forehead to prove his earnestness and interest.

The doctor had submitted several queer bits of Latinity to him, all which Mr. Creed

had made out ; and the doctor was delighted.

Of course Fraser knew Latin ; in what other language had he written his prescriptions.

But the Pharmacopœia was one thing and old chronicles another ; and though he could quote Horace with sweetness and give you scraps of Virgil in proof of his appreciation of that writer's elegance, he had not kept up his knowledge of Latin as he assuredly would have done, had he followed a less busy vocation.

In the old chronicles and other books he had been thumbing for his "Milborough and its Antiquities," he had very often come across a passage of which he could simply make neither head nor tail.

But how smart Mr. Creed was over these involved barbarisms!

The shrewdness of his guesses was really surprising.

His mind did not belie his quick and elusive eyes which, apparently intent upon the print, would be raised to the doctor's face and turned downwards again with the rapidity of a thought.

In truth, they were eyes not to be watched without a certain inward disturbance and frequent questioning of the instincts; but the doctor was already prejudiced, and therefore found nothing that did not please him in Mr. Creed.

And all the time that Mr. Creed sat frowning over the books and the manuscript notes, and hazarding definitions, and offering suggestions of the happiest kind

the doctor was congratulating himself on having obtained such valuable assistance, and looking forward to many agreeable and improving hours to be spent in Mr. Creed's society.

But this was a mere probationary evening, and no work was done, though there was much conversation.

On nine o'clock striking Mr. Creed rose; but Dr. Fraser was so well pleased with his company that he begged him to resume his seat, which Mr. Creed did.

And nearly three quarters of an hour passed before Mr. Creed rose for the second time.

"I need hardly tell you, Mr. Creed," said the doctor with great civility, accompanying him to the hall door, "that I shall be very glad to see you without re-

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ference to the days named in our arrangement."

"You are truly kind, sir," answered Mr. Creed bowing.

"A conversation," said the doctor, "such as we have had to-night, does me good. You see, in talking about a thing one is obliged to regard it from all points of view. I can see my way in the history as I have not seen it before. It is a definite conception now. But it must not be hurried."

"On no account," said Mr. Creed.

And then, as was his custom, giving the other time to resume, added,—

"I wish you respectfully, good-night, sir."

"Good-night, Mr. Creed."

The thin and lank figure with the bush

of hair under the back of his head, went deferentially down the doorsteps and deferentially into the darkness.

The doctor waited until he heard the garden gate banged, then closed the door and joined Helen.

She had been sitting alone ever since her father had left her, working hard at a little frock she had promised to a poor woman for her child on the morrow morning.

Such a long spell of solitude might have left some ladies rather sulky and quiet ; but Helen met her father with her sweet smile and put her work down to talk with him.

"Mr. Creed has just left me," he said, seating himself somewhat wearily as a man might, out of whom the sense of enjoyment that has sustained him, has

suddenly gone. "He is a clever fellow—a man I could talk with through a whole night."

"I am very glad you are pleased with him, dear," Helen answered, rising and bringing a low chair from the wall for him to rest his feet on.

There was something so perfectly unobtrusive and gentle in the action that he may fairly be forgiven for not noticing it.

She went back to her chair and resumed her work, but kept her eyes often on him, that he might know she listened to what he said.

And what he said was all about his book and the capital suggestions Creed had made, and how he would astonish his London friends by the publication which would exhibit real scholarship.



Old Stephen Jones of Sackville Street, who used to glory in his *classicalities* and take pleasure in quietly snubbing him on points which had died out of his memory, would sicken with jealousy when this volume was put into his hands and he saw the margin filled with notes that would do no discredit to Morhoff or Bentley.

He wanted his London friends to hear of him in this form. He had taken a good reputation away with him as a physician; he should like them to know that his abilities were not limited to the hospital.

"Alter rixatur de lanâ sæpe caprinâ,  
Propugnat nugis armatus : scilicet, ut non  
Sit mihi prima fides : et vere quod placet, ut non  
Acriter elatrem, pretium ætas altera sordet.  
Ambigitur quid enim ? Castor sciat an Docilis plus,  
Brundusium Numici melius via ducat an Appl."

HORACE.

How often had he thrummed this chord !  
The tune was as well known to Helen as  
his face ; but she would never permit her-  
self to grow tired of it.

That he was selfish to speak only of the  
thing that interested him, never of the  
things which interested her, could not occur  
to her. How could he stoop his great  
sympathies, which towered so high in in-  
tellectual regions that they were beyond  
her mind's vision to follow them, to such  
tiny interests as occupied her attention ?  
Would she have wished him to speak of  
Louis, of her love for him, of his character,  
of his goodness, which were dear to her as  
her own conscience ? So little was she  
used to such condescension from him, that  
it would have scared her almost to receive  
it, as an infant is scared by the kiss or

greeting of the father it has never seen till then.

She was contented to dream her dream alone, happy that it was approved by her father, eager to keep it hid, that it might not trouble him by the merest hint of its existence.

Perhaps she was not entirely happy. Perhaps she sometimes felt the want that visits the heart of the orphan.

But this was her soul's secret—hidden so deep that it was scarcely known to her consciousness.

She had lived so long in a world of her own, that she hardly knew it should be otherwise with her than it was. Her own thoughts, at least, made a pleasant music in it; there were fancies that grew in it like flowers, and sweetened the moral at-

mosphere ; and she could not be companionless whilst she had her heart to commune with.

So her father might talk of what pleased him best, and she would listen to him with all her sympathies, proud to have his confidence, happy to think that it was still her privilege to please him.

For herself, when he was done, she could withdraw into her own little world, and not fret because her father did not follow her thither, but rather think it too narrow a universe for his great mind to enter or understand.

She quitted it now to listen to him conversing about his book and Mr. Creed—left the sweet voices that filled its silence, the love that imparted a beauty to it it had scarcely known before ; left the silent

contemplations of her lover, of the happiness he had given her, of the pleasures she was to know with him, of the good that was to be done, of the poor that were to be fed, of the wanderers that were to be recalled, when she should be his wife ; left all these things, which had made up the life of the lonely evening she had spent, to listen with loving attention to her father talking of his book and Mr. Creed.

These are the self-sacrifices we call amiability. Of those who thus sacrifice, we pray that the reward, both here and hereafter, may be great.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### VISITING.

"But is her magic only felt below?  
Say, through what brighter realms she bids it flow?  
To what pure beings in a nobler sphere  
She yields delight but faintly imaged here?"—ROGERS.

"To plunder'd want's half-sheltered hovel go—  
Go, and some hunger-bitten infant hear  
Moan haply in a dying mother's ear :  
Or when the cold and dismal fog-damps brood  
O'er the rank churchyard, with sear elm-leaves strewed,  
Pace round some widow's grave, whose dearer part  
Was slaughtered, where o'er his uncoffin'd limbs  
The flocking flesh-birds scream'd ! Then, while thy  
heart  
Groans, and thine eye a fierce sorrow dims,  
Know (and the truth shall kindle thy young mind)  
What nature makes thee mourn she bids thee heal."

COLERIDGE.

HELEN had promised Louis to meet him at Martha Bridgman's next morning, and afterwards take a walk with him; and when the morning came, and breakfast was over, she took the frock she had finished the evening before, and went out.

So far, July had been an unclouded month—nights of deep tranquillity and starlight—days of hot sunshine and beaming skies.

As yet autumn had given no hint of her approach. It was midsummer time, and nature had reached the full height and abundant maturity of her beauty.

It was a sight to look from the windows of the Gray House down the long sweep of hill, into the valley where the river flowed. The hill resembled a huge mosaic, with its many and vivid colours, its high

corn-fields, its green tracts, and great groups of trees, under which the shadows lay black and cool. And far down at its base was the valley, with houses standing in orchards, and a river, like a slender silver line, gleaming through the meadows until it faded in the distance.

Helen, quietly attired in a dark silk dress and a straw hat, which threw a shadow over her eyes, left the Gray House, bearing a basket, in which were secreted various little matters, besides the dress, which should bring comfort to Martha Bridgman.

The town was half a mile off; she came upon a full view of it when she turned the corner of the road, and a large and straggling place it looked, filling the valley, and even making an effort to scale Can-



more Hill, the steep sides of which bounded it to the south.

In the very heart of it was the castle, dear to Dr. Fraser's antiquarian soul—a rugged unroofed pile, whose picturesque suggestiveness was scarcely deformed by several high factory chimneys which took the eye from it. Rows upon rows of roofs running up and down ; a great open space filled with shrubbery and smooth lawns ; a noble church, of proportions and aspect veritably cathedral-like ; a smaller church, with a pointing spire and flaming vane ; a long street, on the sunny side of which the shop-windows flashed back the light ; some snug estates on the outskirts, with well-walled orchards ; on the west and east, the many-coloured land rising and falling to the horizon ; in the south, Can-

more Hill, rearing its sides ridged with wood, and looking from its summit over the gilded prospect of a whole county.

Such was the coup d'œil obtained from the top of the hill down which Helen was progressing into the main street of Milborough.

Almost the very first house you came to on entering the town from this side was an old inn, whence the coaches used to start, and where they halted in the old times before railways.

A picturesque old inn it was, with a court-yard, and a great gallery running around it, and a vast sign-board, suspended like a flag, and bearing a portrait, of which the lineaments had long been jumbled up and hopelessly confused by exposure to wet weather.

The very last person Helen cared to meet was standing in the court-yard of this inn, talking to an ostler, whose behaviour suggested a very intimate acquaintance.

He was a youngish-looking man, with thick red whiskers and enflamed eyes ; and he leaned against a post, and wore a cut-away coat, and a long waistcoat, and a deer-stalking hat, and tight breeches, and big boots with thick soles.

He was smoking a black pipe ; but as Helen passed, he pulled it out of his mouth to stare at her, which he did very impudently indeed ; and even made a step forward as if with the intention of following her, but altered his mind, and replaced his pipe with a frown.

This young man was Horace Lenden, Louis's half-brother ; and it was natural

that when Helen had passed him, she should think of his mother, particularly as her ladyship's house was in sight.

When you talk of a certain individual, he will, you know, appear ; and in this case a thought seemed potent enough to summon the person Helen had in her mind ; for just as she came abreast of a large detached villa, with a neat front garden, and a couple of small stone lions slumbering on either side the door, who should come out of it but Lady Haddon.

This was an awkward meeting.

Helen always felt embarrassed when she met her ladyship. Louis had introduced them, but Lady Haddon took care never to salute Helen with a more cordial recognition than a stiff and distant bow.

She was prepared for this now, and

meant to return it with her own sweet smile, when to her surprise her ladyship on catching sight of her crossed the road with a gracious expression on her face, and extended her hand.

She was a tall woman, capable, when she chose, of assuming a majestic port, with a roman nose, and a bunch of ringlets against each cheek; her costume, a large bonnet with a large feather, a stiff silk dress, and a swelling mantle.

"How do you do, Miss Fraser?" said she, taking Helen in from top to toe, and smiling resolutely. "You are out early this morning."

"I am going to Martha Bridgman," answered Helen, with an explanatory glance at her basket.

"Will my son be there?" inquired her ladyship.

"I expect to meet him," said Helen, blushing.

"Ha!" exclaimed Lady Haddon, giving her smile a screw up, so to speak, to keep the expression fixed, and obstinate to the influence of her emotions. "You and he are very much together, aren't you? You will be quite an adept at parish-work. Don't let me keep you standing. I am going into the town. You see I am forced to do my own marketing. Unfortunately I cannot afford a housekeeper, and servants are not to be trusted. The tradesmen call for orders, but they never send you the kind of thing you want. And I find this particularly the case with my butcher."

She rattled on, greatly to Helen's surprise, who had never suspected her friend-

liness, and could not conceive what had produced the change in her.

All the same she could perceive that there was some little bitterness mixed up with the lady's cordiality, and that that cordiality was not altogether so spontaneous as it was plainly her ladyship's wish it should appear.

"Louis tells me you are very much among the poor," said Lady Haddon, peering at Helen under her hat. "I hope you find them grateful. But you would hardly require gratitude. Charity is its own reward, undoubtedly: though not the reward many greatly care about."

Helen wondered if Louis had told his mother that Dr. Fraser had sanctioned his engagement with her.

She raised her eyes to judge by Lady

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Haddon's face if she had her son's secret ; but the worldly countenance with the fluctuating expression and set smile told her nothing.

Lady Haddon did not again refer to Louis. Possibly she had discovered as much as she wanted in the little colour that had come into Helen's cheek. She spoke of the tradespeople, how they cheated, how many ladies nowadays were altogether too fashionable and important to attend to their expense-books and do their own house-keeping, but that she belonged to an old school, when the mistress of the house had always a bunch of keys jingling at her waist, and how, when she (Lady H.) was a girl, she had seen the Duchess of Kidderminster over and over again cheapening vegetables and eggs in the market-place,



and returning to her princely home followed by men carrying her purchases.

All this was no more than an apology for turning into a butcher's shop, which she did after shaking Helen's hand.

Helen was glad to be alone. She was puzzled but not displeased by this unexpected civility.

For herself, she had never troubled her mind about the view Lady Haddon might take of her engagement; her heart was with Louis and her father; she was ignorant, moreover, of that form of life which her ladyship illustrated, and nobody had ever taught her that some significance was to be attached to the hostility of a woman who was likely to become her mother-in-law.

But she was glad for Louis' sake that his

mother had been polite to her. It would please him to hear it, and lighten the trouble her objection caused him by suggesting a change.

She very well knew that her ladyship had no love for Dr. Fraser. Louis had hinted as much,—indeed, had told her the reason: and often she had longed for an opportunity to explain to Lady Haddon that her father had meant no slight in not returning her call, that he had come into the country for retirement, and would have treated the first lady in the land with the same unconscionable indifference he had exhibited to society at large in Milborough.

If that explanation were made, Helen was sure her ladyship would view Dr. Fraser more favourably; and she had only to know him to find out his noble and good

qualities, his great talents—in short, his superiority to all other men.

Thus pondering, Helen walked down the main street, with its new buildings and gaudily-stocked shop-windows, radiant with plate glass reflecting the sunshine ; across the broad stone bridge that spanned the river, past the noble church of St. Mary's, with its great stained window and fretted towers and ancient roof, gray with age and speckled with tufts of moss ; and so on to Cambridge Street, a dim and antique settlement that made a glaring anachronism of the huge warehouses which were grouped at its corner.

You looked down this street as at a fantastic panorama in which were caricatured the gable-roofed and beetle-browed habitations of two centuries ago. The grass

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springing in the roadway showed how little it was frequented by wheels or hoofs. The dusty and faded houses of all sizes and aspects, some of them leaning for sheer weariness against the shoulders of their steadier neighbours, many of them with their doorways sunk beneath the rough pavement, excellently illustrating the weight of years they carried, had for the most part, the greater number of their windows broken, and nearly every lattice had its share of dirty rags stuffed into the broken panes to exclude the air.

Cambridge Street was in fact the poorest part of Milborough, the haunt of disease, and vice, and poverty, some of the houses tenanted by half-a-dozen families: and from every house issued the sounds of children crying, and the gruff

voices of men, and the shrill chatter of women.

Here and there a window crowded with rags, old bottles, books falling to pieces, fragments of iron and such like ware, indicated a laudable effort on the part of the occupant to obtain a livelihood by keeping a shop. Over the door of one house was a board, on which was rudely written, "Lodgings for Travellers," where for twopence a man could get a bed for the night, of what character we need not inquire; and which was, no doubt, the hotel at which the vagabonds who visited Milborough put up:—Italian boys with monkeys, Swiss gentry who cut capers to the howling of their atrocious pipes, tumblers in tights, and the melancholy organ-grinder—poor tired wanderers, whom one sees and passes

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with never a thought of what becomes of them when the day is done and they must sleep.

Many little children were playing in the street—wretched and hungry children out of whom the fell hand of Misery could scarcely crush the innocence; it shone in little eyes turned upon the broken go-cart trailed by tiny hands; it spoke in the laughter that lighted up faces so wan and pale that it filled the heart with sorrow to watch them.

Through these little groups Helen made her way, sometimes stopping to pick up a baby that could scarcely toddle, and set it on its feet with a tender caress of her soft hand, sometimes bending to speak to some sobbing child and making it laugh with the gift of a penny; until she reached one of the

meanest of the mean and squalid houses, and pushed open the door which was ajar.

An old woman sat in an armchair opposite a fire-place, a younger woman occupied a stool in the centre of the room busily patching a coat which consisted of patches ; a little child lay half naked upon the floor endeavouring to reach a kitten which had fled for refuge under a piece of furniture that looked like a sofa. There was a cloth composed of sacks sewn together, nailed to the ceiling to divide the room which in prosperous days would appear to have known folding-doors.

Let that sackcloth conceal the dirt and wretchedness beyond; God knows enough misery was visible on this side of it.

There was a piece of broken carpet where the old woman sat, otherwise the

floor was bare. There was a table, there was a shelf on which were a few cups, and there was a mattress rolled up in a corner—freshly redeemed, may be, from the pawnbroker.

And these things, with the half naked child on the floor, and the old woman opposite the fireplace, and the younger woman patching the patched coat, made up the contents of the room.

The light shone dimly through the dirty window-glass, already well obscured by rags, and it seemed a habitation which the very eye of Divine Mercy itself had overlooked and left to decay in loathsomeness and starvation.

“God be praised!” cried the younger woman, jumping up and letting fall the coat. “Mother, here’s Miss Fraser.”



And she looked keenly at the basket.

The little child got upon its feet and looked at the basket too.

The old woman turned her head, not to look, for she was blind, but guessing where the door was and where the welcome comer would be.

"Yes, here I am, Mrs. Bridgman," said Helen, placing her basket upon the table. "And here's the frock I promised you for Sarah. Grandmother looked ailing when I was here last, and so I have brought her a bottle of wine, but mind—it is for her, for no one else. Here is a loaf, and here is a whole cheese, and some gravy-beef for Sarah, and positively a seed-cake for Sarah too and a box of sardines for grandmother, and a whole half-crown for mother,

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which she will spend as I tell her, and not give to her husband, or I shall never come to see her again."

Thus speaking Helen emptied the contents of her basket upon the table.

It was a pleasant sight to see Mrs. Bridgman's face when she thanked Helen for these gifts, and pleasant to watch the old woman turning her blind eyes upwards and calling a blessing upon this charitable heart ; scarcely so pleasant to see little Sarah grasp the bit of cake her mother broke off for her, and eat it ravenously.

Here was an old story : the husband out of work, an aged grandmother helpless under the burden of years and blindness, a mother scarcely able to obtain five shillings a week by "charing" for a tradesman in the High Street, and a half-starved,

half-naked little infant of four, who had certainly tasted no food that morning when the bit of cake was given her.

These are sordid details for the pages of a novel, but then they are lying under all our noses if we will but look at them, and the novelist should be forgiven for putting into his book people whom Dives may see pass before his drawing-room windows, and houses he may find by turning the corner of his street.

At all events here is a delicate girl whose nerves may be no stronger than those of the Lady Arabella who finds the smell of Eau de Cologne sometimes too powerful for her—here is Helen breathing a heavy and sluggish air with no visible disgust on her face, turning her eyes on the poor creatures who are hungrily

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devouring the bread she has brought them, with no other look than that of a profound compassion which trembles on the very verge of tears. She thinks of the Shepherd whose sheep these people are ; of the promises He has made them ; of the blessings He spoke to them ; and loves to be among them, since they are of the kind the Master came to comfort, taking them to His sacred heart, and bidding all men feed and succour them for His sake who died for all men.

She drew the stool near the blind old woman and talked to her cheerfully, and asked questions of the mother about her husband, and bade Sarah repeat the little prayer she had taught her the week before, which Sarah did with many a pause, and eyes that wandered constantly to the

cake upon the table, while the grandmother listened with a smile and said it was beautiful.

Such was the scene that Louis Haddon, pushing open the door, stood for a moment contemplating.

He entered, bringing with him some of the sweetness and light of the air and sunshine he had quitted, and took Helen's hand with a fond look into her eyes and a soft "good morning, dearest," then turned to the women and asked after their health, and patted Sarah's head, and looked about him for a seat.

Martha was for having her old mother make way for the gentleman; but this he stopped by pulling the mattress out of the corner and sitting upon it.

Here were the lovers together under

circumstances that delighted them both a thousandfold more than had they been surrounded by every poetical adjunct which romance holds needful to the tender passion. The bond of sympathy that united them was rendered infinitely potent by the merciful purpose that had brought them together into this dim and sordid chamber.

Louis had not come empty-handed. In truth, he was not one of those who hold that spiritual sustainment suffices man in this world. That idea, if ever he had entertained it, must have been put to flight by seeing a man, the January before, and in a house not far down that street, dead of hunger and cold, with a face upon him that was a reproach to all humanity.

But let us close the door of this little

house in Cambridge Street and follow our young couple into the open air.

It was twelve o'clock, and the sun shone with a scorching light from the cloudless sky; but there were trees making deep cool shadows in the valley through which the river flowed, and thither the lovers made their way.

Whilst they crossed the bridge Helen told Louis that she had met his mother.

"She walked with me from her house as far as Thrugg's, the butcher in High Street, and was very friendly," said Helen, determined not to take account of the hints in her ladyship's manner and remarks which had suggested a contrary conclusion.

"Really!" exclaimed Louis, looking puzzled. "That is strange, isn't it?"

"It was unexpected," said Helen, laugh-

ing. "I thought you had told her we were engaged."

"That wouldn't make her friendly, dearest."

"Well, I hoped she had changed her mind and ceased to think ill of me."

"Ill of you! no, no! don't say that, Helen. She can't think ill of you. That would be wicked, it would be worse than wicked. I am sure that in her heart she reverences your character."

"It is papa."

"No, not your father. To be sure she owes him a grudge—but the motive is so weak that it could not sustain itself were it not supported by other reasons. It is Clara Vane. There you have the whole secret. And Horace is eternally talking about me to my mother, and prejudicing



her. He influences her, although she is always deploring his conduct."

"I caught a glimpse of him as I passed the Red Lion. He was in the courtyard, and though I didn't look at him, I felt that he stared at me angrily."

"I can tell you why. There was a quarrel between us last night. I was to blame as much as he, for I answered him warmly. But he was very rude and trying. I can't bear to hear anyone speak slightly of you. He was taunting, and talked wildly when he spoke of Clara as if I were abandoning both him and my mother to misery and starvation by refusing to marry her. I told him that he ought to seek his own fortune and not expect me to make it for him by marriage with a girl I don't love."

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"Was Lady Haddon present?"

"Yes."

"And this morning she was polite to me," said Helen, thoughtfully.

"I suspect her intentions, Helen. She wants to find out whether I am engaged to you or not. I must tell her the truth."

"I think you should. The happiest secret will throw a kind of shadow over the spirits. Besides, your mother is entitled to your confidence."

"Yes, but would she respect it? Wouldn't she use it against me? That fear makes me hesitate. It is a sad state of things. I love my mother—there is almost nothing I would not do for her—and yet we are at war because of her really absurd wishes."

They were now in the valley walking

under the cool trees, with the river lapping the banks at their side.

There was a wonderful calm here, which was scarcely broken by the occasional notes of birds and the humming of bees probing the wild flowers in the sunny openings.

The river stretched forward with many a gentle bend, reflecting with clearest outline the near bridge and the water-loving plants that overhung it; and here and there a willow leaning as though in contemplation of the delicate tracery of leaves which the reflection idealized, grasped the smooth edge of the bank with its roots and sipped the water with its lowermost branches.

On the thither side where the meadows were the cows lay smoking under the

sweltering sun, languidly lashing the gadflies with their tails and turning drowsy eyes upon the two figures moving slowly among the trees.

The river appeared tideless, and there was scarcely air enough to propel the curled leaves that floated on the surface of the water.

"I fear my love has brought trouble to you, Louis," said Helen, rather sadly.

"Not trouble—the purest happiness," he answered, taking her hand. "What is the trouble? Your father has sanctioned our love and we at least know each other's heart. There is no trouble. My mother is not an obstinate woman. Her wish about Clara is a good deal kept alive by Horace, who is incessantly reminding us how rich she is, and what a fine living

Lord Torchester would present me with, and what an excellent appointment I could obtain for him through my influence—some diplomatic post, his idea is, which would enable him to go abroad and see life. That is the idea—and only an idea. He thought I was sarcastic when I told him that he should go down to Cambridge and marry Clara himself. Really his chance is as good as mine. A long time ago, Mrs. Vane told my mother jokingly that she thought Clara and I would make a pretty couple: and my mother has never forgotten the remark. But Clara is a woman now, and Mrs. Vane is as ambitious as any mother can well be whose daughter is an heiress. My mother doesn't consider that Clara might not find me to her liking . . . but really, Helen,

the mere discussion of this silly subject is a rank piece of disloyalty to you. I love only one girl. I can never love another."

Helen knew the value of these words in his mouth. They would have been the merest commonplaces of passion or sentiment in many men. But Louis was always in earnest.

Suppose her father had objected to her engagement: would she have defied him as Louis was defying his mother?

She thought of her love for her father, of his influence over her, of the effect an appeal made to her would produce, and her heart melted as she looked into Louis's eyes and felt the force and depth and preciousness of the love that bound him to her in defiance of the strong sense of duty which the faithful character of his

religious feelings would insist on his holding due to his mother.

From this point their conversation took a lighter tone, and they rambled onwards hand in hand, often pausing to study a glimpse of lovely landscape coloured like gold by the sunshine, or to listen to a bird pouring forth its song from the trees that towered above them.

They came to a lane presently, with high banks on either side, crowned with great tracts of cornfield, with poppies peeping over the edges, and ridged with bramble-bushes, out of which the birds flew with short cries. They climbed this lane, leaving the cool valley behind them, and gaining the main road, walked towards the Gray House.

## CHAPTER IX.

### AN INSULT.

"HUSH'D were his Gertrude's lips; but still their bland  
And beautiful expression seem'd to melt  
With love that could not die! and still his hand  
She presses to her heart." CAMPBELL.

HELEN asked Louis to come in and lunch with them; but he declined, and said he must bid her good-bye, but was a long time saying it.

They stood in the doorway, under the shadow of a lilac, and were talking earnestly when Dr. Fraser came along the road.



His face was pale, and his lips pressed together. Helen thought his paleness was owing to the heat, and drew herself aside to make room for him to pass.

It seemed as if he would enter without noticing either of them. But when he was within the gate, he turned and said to Louis, frowning fiercely as he spoke,

“I met your brother just now, and a more insulting young cub I don’t think I ever encountered.”

There was great irritation in his voice, and his eyes sparkled with anger.

Helen turned pale, and looked at her lover.

“I am afraid that Horace is very reckless in his language——” Louis began.

“Reckless!” interrupted Dr. Fraser,

letting lose all the indignation he had kept pent up in his breast ; " it was well for him that I had no cane in my hand, or I should have flogged him."

The others watched him in silence.

" I was with Mr. Creed, whom I had appointed to meet in order to inspect a book he wished to show me, and was walking with him in the direction of Bush's house, when your brother came up to me, planting himself with an insolent gesture directly in my way. I stopped, and Mr. Creed, touching my arm, whispered that the fellow was intoxicated."

" What did he say?" asked Louis, colouring up vehemently.

" He hiccupped out that his mother didn't wish you to marry my daughter, and that if I was a man of honour I would

cease to *entice* you—he used that word!—to my house!”

Louis bit his lip. Helen clasped her hands, and glanced piteously at her father’s face.

There was a pause, during which Dr. Fraser snapped a twig off a bush and flung it at his feet.

“I hope, Dr. Fraser,” exclaimed Louis, “that you won’t mind what my brother said. There are times when he is not responsible for his actions and words. He is like a madman when he has been drinking.”

“But is it actually *thought*,” cried the doctor, “that I entice you to my house?”

He stared and muttered “Entice you! . . . entice you!” as if he could not comprehend the words he uttered.

“Who thinks it? who would dare say it but my brother?” answered Louis. “He knew he was speaking falsely. Never—I will swear it—has that idea crossed my mother’s mind. Never. This is one of Horace’s wild and reckless charges, which he will have forgotten when I speak to him about it.”

He snatched up Helen’s hand, and held it.

The action was so impulsively performed, that it expressed his feelings as no language could have done.

Helen stood silent, with bowed head and white face. She had never before seen her father so moved, and his passion frightened her.

“If I thought——” the doctor began, and bit his lip, looking from one to the other of the young couple.

He resumed: "I am known and respected here by those whose opinions I care about. But to be insulted in the presence of a man like Mr. Creed . . . for what? I have sanctioned your engagement because I believe you love each other. Helen knows. This is her affair. I make no opposition, for it does not concern me, but her. She is the best judge of her future; and if she thinks you can make her happy, I am satisfied. What do I care for Lady Haddon? I do not know her. Yes—we met once; but such knowledge does not create intimacy. I told you the other night that Lady Haddon was to be your battle, not mine. But if she is to let that cub of hers loose on me, to insult me in the street, I will make an end of it all. I will go my ways. By heaven, no

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living creature here shall control, or judge, or interfere with me !”

He stamped his foot, and pulled off his hat and wiped his forehead, upon which the veins were full.

“Why do you allow Horace’s wilfulness to vex you ?” Louis remonstrated, fearful that more had been said than the doctor cared to repeat, and thus accounting for a display of temper which he could scarcely reconcile with the plain story he had heard. “He insults his own mother. He will address language to her that drives me from the room. It is not that he cares for any of us—his own mother included—that he interferes between me and my love, and would do all he could to dash my hopes to pieces. God knows, I have borne with him long—I could bear with him always if

he would leave my love alone. I am deeply humiliated to think that I should have been the instrument of an insult offered to one whom I respect and admire as I do you."

There was no doubting his sincerity and grief. He fondled and caressed Helen's hand as he spoke, and looked at the angry man with such winning honesty and unfeigned sorrow, that the doctor must have been blind not to see and be disarmed by the appeal.

"I don't blame you," said Dr. Fraser, subduing himself with a great effort. "Of course, you are not responsible for the drunken habits of this boy. I believe you when you tell me that my *enticement* of you—as he was pleased to put it—was an invention of his own, such as never oc-

curred to Lady Haddon. . . . Good heaven! how *could* it occur to her? Entice you! Have I not shut my doors against the people here? Have I not gained a notoriety among the dinner-loving cliques no man would relish but one who, like myself, is utterly indifferent to public opinion, by my inhospitality and exclusiveness? Entice you! I want no friends but those of my own choosing. I am here, not to be baited by, but to escape, civilities. Teach Lady Haddon that, and she will call her son Horace a liar."

Saying which he turned on his heel and entered the house.

Louis looked at Helen, who was trembling like the leaves of the bush her father had struck in his passage.



"My darling, this shall not separate us," he said.

"Oh Louis, I do not fear that. But is not his passion terrible? He has often been irritable, but his eyes never shone as they did when he looked at you and spoke of your brother. What more than we have heard could he have said to make papa so angry?"

"Why, he used bad language, I dare say; and what is there more insulting? But I can do nothing. I am no match for Horace. He is so reckless, and passionate, and defiant, that it is absurd and hopeless to reason with him. I don't know what will restrain him. Not fear. Your father's threats could not terrify him."

Just then the clock in the hall struck one.

"I must join papa," said Helen. "Come, dearest."

No ; Louis said he must go.

He kissed her fondly, whispering endearing words, begging her to let nothing depress her nor come between them, and went away.

Helen found her father in the dining-room, pacing up and down before the window.

Lunch was ready, and when she opened the door the doctor took his seat.

By this time, if his temper had not cooled, he had at least been able to exercise his powerful will to subdue it ; his face was composed, his manner grave, but not destitute of a certain sullenness, which darkened his forehead and kept his eyes averted from his daughter.

"Would not Louis join us?" he asked, addressing her from that long moral distance at which he was wont to keep her, and which his manner now very sharply defined.

"No, papa."

"I had no wish to pain him. I know that he is innocent of his brother's behaviour. But I am not to be subjected to that whelp's insults. The people here must never misconstrue my love of solitude, and consider me a fit object of persecution for the blackguards of the place, because I act as if I were a man conscious of social deficiencies. They must know that I shun them because I do not want them; and I will submit to no behaviour that shall gratify their dislike of me."

"But you are not disliked, papa; and

who is there that would insult you but a boy like Horace, who is drinking in low taverns all day long?"

She was going to tell him of Lady Haddon's friendliness that morning, but she had an instinctive distrust of the woman; and the argument to be drawn from the incident would be too plausible to satisfy her scrupulous love of truth.

"What did he mean by stopping me in the street?" cried the doctor. "What is his object? How dared he address me? How does his brother's engagement affect him? You tell me that the fellow hopes to get something for himself if Haddon marries some cousin of his. But is it not the drunken echo of his mother's contempt of us—of her belief that you are not good enough for her son to marry?"

"No, no, papa."

The doctor frowned. He had never before discussed the love between Louis and his child with any interest; and now that he was forced to look at it closely, he felt a contempt for it—as we might expect he would, seeing that he was [a man who had no sympathy with any kind of emotion that had not its inspiration in the brain.

He raised his eyes to his daughter's face. She was watching him anxiously—nay, with an attention that was almost passionate—as if she divined his thoughts, and dreaded the words that should control her.

They were on his tongue, but he did not utter them.

But for the sweet and earnest eyes that pleaded to him, the fair face contracted

with the pain of intuitive perception of his thoughts, and the tender and beautiful memories of love, and duty, and self-sacrifice, that gathered about her to throw their light upon the grief which the unspoken decision of his heart, legibly recorded on his face, was causing her, he might there and then have withdrawn his sanction from the engagement which had earned him an insult, and which, to him, appeared full of the humiliation of Lady Haddon's disapproval.

In that case, the sacrifice that was to be exacted later on from Helen, would have been demanded too soon; but none the less should we almost regard it as a heavier test than the most perfect type of human duty could sustain without mutilation. Should we have lost the ideal heroine in

the weak woman, and witnessed the collapse of a virtue whose strength and purity had brought her so near to the angels ?

We think not. We cherish the memory of this woman, and hold her incomparable. We can witness, in fancy, a breaking heart ; but we can discern no decay of that spiritual power whose triumph is over the passions and the heart's longings.

But this was an ordeal Helen was to be spared.

“ The fellow's brutality,” said her father, dwelling on the subject of the insult, but dismissing the thought that, for the moment, had been uppermost in his mind, “ would have been less mortifying to me had Creed not been a spectator. Such an audience as that will make very slight offences heavy trials.”

"But Mr. Creed would see that the boy was intoxicated," answered Helen, relinquishing her strained attention with a sigh of relief.

"He was not intoxicated. No doubt he had been drinking; but he had his wits about him. He knew where to slip in his oaths, and what to say. 'How dare you entice my brother to your house when you know that Lady Haddon is opposed to his visiting you?' Those were his words. Do they sound drunken? I thrust him into the road and passed on, and he roared his abuse after me, and called me . . ." he stopped, growing very pale, and biting his lip.

"It is not likely to happen again," said Helen, plaintively.

The doctor made no answer, but left the



table and went to the window, and there stood for some minutes, plainly battling with the fierce anger his recurrence to the unpardonable insult had re-excited.

He then left the room.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE TWO BROTHERS.

"By my troth, this is the old fashion! you two never meet but you fall to some discord. What the good year! one must hear, and that must be you."—HENRY IV. p. ii.

MEANWHILE Louis was making his way home, thinking over his brother's conduct, and the danger it had brought to his love.

Though he had spoken the truth when he told Dr. Fraser that he admired and respected him, he was no stranger to various

qualities in the man, which, to say the least, were the reverse of commendable.

Foremost among these qualities was the doctor's coldness to Helen, which, in Haddon's eyes, appeared sometimes positively cruel.

He knew that there was nothing in that girl's nature which was not admirable : and he knew that there was nothing more admirable in her admirable nature than her devotion to her father.

Over and over again he had heard her speak of him in terms which, but for the qualifying character of her love, and for the meek and gentle heart from which it sprang, he would have rebuked as almost idolatrous.

Over and over again he had seen her lavish attentions on him which nothing but

the purest love that never remitted its vigour for an instant could have dictated.

Yet never was there any appreciation in his reception of her attentions—never was there any affectionate recognition of her perfect devotion.

Louis had too keen a sight to find a mystery in the doctor's coldness.

The man's character was essentially a selfish one: and with this discovery the enigma was solved as satisfactorily as need be.

But Louis knew that in such hands as the doctor's, Helen's happiness could not be secure. All his schemes were made without reference to his child. He had closed his doors against his neighbours, because it pleased him to do so; never considering that he might be isolating his

daughter from human interests, and practically suspending the exercise of her sympathies, which were the sweetest part of her nature. Neither did he ever consider that such people as Dr. Bush and old Mr. Rogers, and Mr. Creed, were 'no society for the young girl.

He had his excuse, indeed : she never complained : she seemed happy, and he had therefore a right to assume that she was happy.

But how unfair, Louis would think, how unjust to trespass upon so much sweetness ! how tyrannical to push such amiability to extreme limits, merely to gratify poor and silly caprices !

She was alone all day long, except when he was with her.

She was alone even when among the

poor ; for no pleasurable sense of kinship can ever be excited by mere compassion and sorrow ; sociality can hardly be inspired by scenes of distress ; and the very difference of position in a worldly view would erect a barrier between her and those she ministered to, which no beauty of motive or zeal of charity could level.

It was certain that the insult the doctor had received menaced Helen's happiness.

He would take his own feelings into account, not hers, and might appease his resentment by forbidding the engagement without thought of the grief this action would occasion.

Louis hardly guessed, in thus thinking, how nearly this had been the case.

His brother's conduct must never be repeated. And in Louis' opinion there

was only one way of stopping it : he must be candid ; he must tell his mother of his engagement, that he was resolved to make Helen his wife, and that no interference of any kind was in the least likely to alter his resolution.'

He regretted that he had not been outspoken before. A frank admission of the truth might have saved the quarrel of the morning. But there was no moral cowardice in his reticence. He was a peacemaker, loving conciliation, watchful for auspicious moments, with an affection for his mother that was too great to suffer him to cause her a single pang that opportunity might prevent, or that was not enjoined by the hardest necessity.

He had hoped for a day to come when his mother should have learnt to regard

Helen as the fittest woman he could choose to wed. It was his brother who hardened her. But then this brother would surely weary of the subject, and leave his mother to his own soft and honourable influence.

This was the consideration that had kept him silent; but Horace's conduct had now rendered the hope impracticable; and he must tell his mother the truth and be firm and resolute, and save Helen's and his love from all further risks that might ensue from Horace's vicious character.

He reached his home and entered the drawing-room, which his mother usually occupied, and there he found her, with her work-table by her side, employed in the homely occupation of darning socks.

Worldly as she was in the sense of loving



to brag of her connections, of keeping her eyes on the main chance, of having an inherent dislike of poor people, and a natural aptitude for making friends with the rich and sticking to them, she was an excellent housewife and so strict an economist that she was even considered mean.

But this was not her fault. She had really nothing to live on but her pension and the two hundred a year which came to Louis from his father, but which he gave to her, reserving only enough pocket-money for himself to help the poor with.

You see her ladyship's first husband, Mr. Lenden, had died insolvent, and Horace hadn't a penny.

Old Sir Louis Haddon, suspecting perhaps that his wife would outlive him, made his will with an eye to the contingency of

her ladyship taking a third husband, and so bequeathed his savings to his son. Thus it was very hard work for poor Lady Haddon to support the dignity of her title on the slender means she possessed : and she had to pare and chip and contrive and haggle like any vulgar woman to cut a decent figure and hoax the world with a semblance of plenty.

Her house was comfortable enough, but you might have guessed her character by the number of gimcracks scattered about, and by the spasmodic efforts everywhere discernible to do badly things which are only tolerable when they are done well.

What did she want, for instance, with a grand piano in a room that it half filled ? A third of the money she had paid for that gigantic instrument, over which she

had expended a hundred bottles of polish without making it look six weeks younger, and which had been "rigged" at an auction for her especial behoof, would have purchased a new cottage piano and added an agreeable detail to the room.

But the ornamental was her taste : and rather than not be grand she would air her title amid cheap splendour, and luxuriate in furniture that owed all its strength to glue, and all its elasticity to straw.

"Is Horace at home, mother?" asked Louis, leaning upon the table and addressing his mother across it.

"I have not heard him come in," she answered, plying her needle leisurely.

There was nothing as yet in her son's manner to make her put her work down.

"Where have you been all the morning?"

Visiting, I suppose. By-the-bye, I met Miss Fraser this morning—but of course she told you. I remember now that she said she was going to meet you.”

“She was very much pleased by your speaking to her; but what made you so friendly, mother?”

“Oh, nothing. What could I do? I met her right opposite this house, as I was going out, and I couldn’t help shaking hands.”

“But you have met her face to face over and over again before, and never thought it worth while to shake hands.”

“Why, Louis, what are you trying to think?” asked her ladyship, looking up at him.

“I hardly know : unless you wished to find out how Helen and I stand.”

"And supposing I do," said Lady Haddon, pretending to darn: "may not a mother take an interest in her son's doings?"

"Of course she may. And I don't utter one word of blame against you, mother, for trying to find out my secret in your own way. The fault is mine, because I ought never to have concealed the truth from you."

"The truth!" cried her ladyship, quickly.

"Yes. I have asked Helen to be my wife, and Dr. Fraser has sanctioned our engagement."

"Oh!" exclaimed Lady Haddon. "I shan't sanction the engagement."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't think it's a proper match for you to make."

"But it is. Helen was born to be a clergyman's wife. You don't know her."

"Born to be a clergyman's wife!" cried Lady Haddon derisively. "That may be. Born to be some poor curate's wife who has no hope of preferment and can lose nothing by allying himself with Dr. Fraser's daughter. But *you*!"

"Well?"

"You know what you are doing. You know," said her ladyship, her voice rising higher and higher as she continued to speak, "that you are sacrificing a girl who would accept you in a month's time if you would but make yourself agreeable to her, a girl with a fortune, highly connected, and whose uncle could give you one of the finest livings in Cambridgeshire, to say

nothing of what you could do for my poor penniless Horace."

This was Lady Haddon's stereotyped protest. But Louis heard it with as much patience as if he heard it for the first time.

"Mother," he answered, "I love Helen and mean to make her my wife. You will love her too, some of these days, and justify my choice. I never expected to win her without trouble; for is there not always an objection to every marriage? But I will be patient and wait until your heart softens to this girl who is more friendless than any orphan, but who has a nature that lifts her above all other women and almost obliges her to be alone."

Lady Haddon resumed her work and darned angrily, saying not a word.

What could she say?

There was too much resolution in her son's manner to mislead her; and his resolution took all the more strength from the moderate language in which he had expressed it.

"I have something, mother, to tell you, about Horace," Louis continued presently. "He met Dr. Fraser this morning and insulted him."

"I don't care," said Lady Haddon.

"It must not happen again."

"What is Dr. Fraser to me?" shrieked her ladyship, all her anger and disappointment rushing into her face and reddening it. "Nobody likes him. Nobody knows anything about him. He shuts himself up in his house and all the world says he must be a wicked man, for nothing but sin could make him hide himself. If



Horace insulted him, I daresay he was the aggressor, and it serves him right."

"Dr. Fraser was not the aggressor. He was walking with a young man named Creed when Horace stopped him with an insulting gesture and asked him what he meant by enticing me to his house in opposition to your wishes."

"That's his version," said her ladyship sullenly. "I daresay Horace can tell another story."

"But it is false to charge him with enticing me," exclaimed Louis, battling hard with his temper which was provoked—not by his mother, he never lost his temper with her, though he had abundant excuses for doing so, day after day—but by the reckless falsehood with which he was deal-

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ing. "Dr. Fraser has many faults, but he is a gentleman. . ."

"A gentleman! how do you know?"

"You owned yourself that he was."

"But I didn't know his character in those days. I couldn't guess that he was going to hide himself away as if he were a wild animal afraid of his own claws. Can you tell me who his father was? Is his past history known to you? You are infatuated by your Helen, and will not see what all the world sees. Pray don't call him a gentleman. Would a gentleman let people visit him and never notice their politeness?"

"He never asked people to visit him."

"Never asked! No. But he must be frightfully ignorant of the usages of society if that is his argument, and that

will show you how much of a gentleman he is."

"But think, mother," pleaded Louis gently, "is it likely that Dr. Fraser would entice me to his house, as Horace said? Who am I to be enticed? Am I half as good a match for Helen as she is for me?"

"Oh, this horrid humility!" groaned Lady Haddon. "What would the poor General think, if he were alive, to hear you say that the son of an army officer who was knighted for his bravery, although his widow is not well off, is no match for a doctor's daughter!"

"I did not say I was no match. I meant that in a worldly view—the view you take of Clara Vane, for instance—Helen is a better match for me than I am for her."

"She is not. I deny it," cried Lady Haddon. "And you never shall marry her with my consent."

At this moment a young fellow with a flushed and dirty face, and eyes so inflamed that it seemed as if he had been weeping bitterly, and in a billycock hat slightly tipped over his left brow, and tight breeches, and a long waistcoat, and thick boots—presenting altogether the aspect of a groom in his Sunday clothes, after a long visit at a public house—opened the hall door, and banged it after him, and throwing his hat on to a table, entered the drawing-room with a heavy stare, first at Lady Haddon and then at Louis.

"Here is Horace now," cried her ladyship: "and he will explain his conduct this morning."

"What conduct? what are you talking about?" said Horace in a thick voice, laying hold of the back of a chair and twisting himself into it.

"Why, Louis says you met Dr. Fraser and insulted him," answered Lady Haddon, looking at the young fellow's boots, which were covered with mud.

"So I did. Great beast. What right had he to entice Louis to his house when he knew it was against your wishes?"

"You mistake: he has never enticed me," Louis answered calmly.

"Look here!" shrieked Horace, whose condition was freely illustrated by the strong smell of beer which he had brought with him into the room: "he took me by the arm and shoved me into the road, and I'd have followed and kicked him, by dash,

I would, if I hadn't thought the name I sent after him better than a kicking."

And he writhed his legs and glared heavily around him.

"Why did you speak to him?" asked Louis.

"Find out. What's that to you? Confound it, isn't a fellow at liberty to speak to anybody he pleases without being questioned by a sucking parson or shoved into the gutter as if he was dirt? I am older than you and it's your place to respect me, and not lecture me, do you hear? I hate that Fraser, and you're a sneak to make friends with him against me and mother, and if you were a gentleman you wouldn't do it."

"Come Horace, you mustn't talk like

that," said Lady Haddon. "I merely wanted to hear your version of the affair this morning. Dr. Fraser told Louis you insulted him."

"So I did, and serve him right," growled the wretched youth. "Who cares for Dr. Fraser? Everybody says he's a brute. And if Louis goes to his house after his shoving me off the pavement he'll act like a cad, and as it is, I thank heaven my name's Lenden and not Haddon."

"Horace, how dare you!" cried the mother: "*my* name is Haddon."

"Mother," said Louis, "this discussion is easily ended. Tell Horace that I am engaged to be married to Miss Fraser, and that no insults he can offer her father will change my determination, and he will not

perhaps, think it worth while to trouble the doctor again."

"You are not engaged with my sanction, understand!" exclaimed her ladyship, passionately.

"He's going to be married, is he?" called out Horace. "I suppose the doctor took him by the throat and forced him to whine out his intentions. Isn't he a sneak, mother?" he shrieked, getting upon his legs and holding on to the chair. "Didn't I tell you that he'd get married behind our backs, and fool us, hay? There's a fine religious young man! what's your commandment?" he hiccoughed, looking at his brother. "'Honour thy father and thy mother'—and you mean to teach that commandment, and all the town praises you for a model gentleman! And you



lecture me sometimes—but I wouldn't advise you to try it on again—no, not again!"

And he clenched his fist with a drunken frown.

There was no anger in Louis, but deep pity and grief as he looked at his brother.

And surely no taunts, no bitter accusations, no insulting sneers, could influence such a heart as his to any other emotion than sorrow and compassion for the poor besotted youth whose not uncomely face was seamed and stained with the signal of the demon that had mastered him.

They had been children together, had played with the same toys, had learnt from the same books, had repeated the same prayers.

Louis remembered those old times now, as he stood looking at Horace, frowning and mumbling to himself, and could feel no anger.

“Don’t stare at me like that !” raved the other. “I’m as good as you, and more manly : and nobody ever hears *me* cant, and I don’t look sorrowful when I’m not. I hate hypocrites, and so does every man of the world : and if you were to go into the company I keep, you’d be laughed at as a milk-sop, which you are ; and there’s not a man in Milborough that don’t call you so behind your back. Looking at me ! I won’t have it.”

“Oh Horace, this is not the way to address your brother,” exclaimed Lady Haddon feebly, too angry with Louis to defend him against Horace’s temper, which

she thought justifiable, and objecting only to his language.

“What does he mean then by marrying Fraser’s daughter?” bawled Horace. “He knows what he’s doing—that he’s cutting the ground from under me: He’d like to see me a beggar, and as it is, he’s got two hundred a year, and I’ve got nothing; and every sixpence I want I have to ask you for. Ain’t I the elder? and what right has he to have more money than me?”

“I give all I have to mother,” said Louis.

“Yes, but it’s yours and you needn’t. And you wouldn’t like to feel that it wasn’t yours, for all you give it. So would I give it if it were mine. And you might marry Clara if you liked, but you won’t,

just because you know it would be the making of me. You prefer that brute Fraser's daughter, especially now that he shoved me into the road as if I was a beggar."

And so he hectored and hiccoughed on, always quarrelsome when in drink, and never more quarrelsome than when he was quarrelling with Louis.

Did he ever seriously think that Miss Vane would marry Louis, and that the union would obtain him the patronage of Lord Torchester and a first-class position?

His mother had talked about this thing so much, and he took so much pleasure in irritating her against Louis by recurring again and again to it, and pointing out that his brother was every day with Helen Fraser and ought to be made to drop her,

and marry Clara—talking in short like a madman that he was, and finding plenty of sympathy with his views in his mother—that the idea had become a fixed conclusion which he hugged, not more for its own sake than because it provided him with an excuse to bait his brother with taunts and vex and harass him with envy and dislike.

Louis once asked him why he didn't marry Clara himself, which would make Lord Torchester more willing to serve him than were Clara merely his sister-in-law; but this highly reasonable question had provoked an immense explosion of fury by being regarded as an ironical sneer at Horace's drunken habits and dirty face and bad language; which it certainly was, though quite undesigned, since nothing

could well be more ridiculous than to suppose that a fastidious girl like Clara Vane would stoop to accept such a maudlin, unwashed, and staggering love as this drunken young gentleman was capable of.

Indeed the whole thing was absurd from beginning to end, begotten by Mrs. Vane's foolish remark made years and years before, and by some of Louis' letters written when at Cambridge, in which he told his mother what an agreeable girl Clara was, and how kind the Vanes were to him, and that they lived in a fine house and saw a great deal of company.

I don't say that Lady Haddon didn't deserve some sympathy. She saw that no good would result to Horace out of Louis' marriage with Helen ; but that great ends

might be achieved by him by a union that involved so considerable a person as Lord Torchester in the family circle. His lordship was not likely to do anything for Horace on the strength of the relations that then subsisted between them. Indeed Lady Haddon had no kind of claim upon him, and though she had often made up her mind to write to him about Horace —after she had received that letter from Mrs. Vane in which she said that she wanted the influence she had for her own son, who was then at Eton —she had never had the courage to do so.

Of course she clung to her drunken son. She loved him better than Louis. Her marriage with the old general had been for bread and butter ; but Lenden had been

her first love, and Horace was like him in face, and in nature too, when he was not too drunk to be natural.

Louis was, in a sense, removed out of the sphere of her sympathy by his two hundred a year, and by his character, which she couldn't understand ; but Horace's vices, and oaths, and poverty, only brought him the nearer to her love, by representing him as entirely helpless and dependent on her, and as in the highest degree likely to end his days in a work-house, if, after her death, Louis should cast him off.

Any further discussion of the subject that had detained Louis in the drawing-room after the foolish abuse his brother poured out was ridiculous.

He looked at his mother, whose eyes



were fixed on Horace, and walked out of the room.

Horace staggered after him with a curse, but came back to his chair, probably doubting his capacity to mount the stairs without rolling down them.

"I'll go and see that Fraser, confound me if I don't!" he bawled. "I'll ask him what he meant by shoving me into the road; and if he don't apologise, I'll call him out and shoot him."

"You had better leave him alone," said his mother; "and, for goodness' sake, restrain your language. All your crying out against Louis only hardens and angers him, and there'll be no chance of my preventing the marriage if you insult him so recklessly. He is your brother—remember that; and you have no right to talk to him

about his money, for he gives me every penny of it, as you know, and comes to me as you do when he wants a few shillings."

"He's a milksop!" roared Horace, "and there's not a man in the town that don't call him so; and I'll not hear about his virtues—hang his virtues! He's not half the man that I am; and I hate him when he looks at me—making his eyes seem sorry, the sneak! when he's glad to think that I'm a beggar. But I'll be one with him yet, see if I don't! and I'll make that big cur Fraser curse the moment when he knocked me into the road. And if Louis don't marry Clara, by dash! he shan't marry Helen Fraser. And you'll see who's right!"

Saying which he got up and lurched to the door, through which he looked into the

dining-room opposite, where the servant was laying the cloth for dinner.

A decanter of sherry stood upon the table; this was enough for Horace; he staggered over to it at once, and left his mother talking to the walls.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A BLOW.

"What ! can the everlasting elements  
Feel with a worm-like man ? If so the shaft  
Of mercy-winged lightning would not fall  
On stones and trees."—SHELLEY.

"Lend me a light—know we this face or no ?  
Alas ! my friend and my dear countryman,  
Roderigo ? No—yes, sure ; yes, 'tis Roderigo !"  
" *Othello.*"

AFTER Dr. Fraser left the dining-room, when he had finished lunch, Helen did not see him again until dinner time.

She passed a sorrowful afternoon, influenced by a sense of impending trouble,

which was of course referable to the quarrel between her father and Horace, and to the consequences that might spring from it to menace her love.

Louis could not see her again that day, as he had some visits to make, and had promised to spend the evening at the Rectory.

It was too hot to go into the town ; but the trees threw a pleasant shadow over the grounds, and thither she repaired with her work, and spent a couple of hours there, seated on a bench under the trees, screened from the house, though seeing it.

All outside the shadows was the pouring sunshine, turning the mould in the beds ash-colour with the heat, and parching up the grass, and causing the flowers to hang their heads. There was, indeed, an op-

pressive and sultry stillness in the air that was ominous when coupled with the great heat; and had she looked from the top windows of the house, facing the south, she might have guessed what this heat portended, from the livid haze that had gathered over the sky and swallowed up the horizon in that direction.

There was no means of keeping cool, save by keeping quiet; she dropped her work, and lay back against the seat, watching the big bees crawling into the flowers, and a pair of blackbirds chasing the sparrows under the currant bushes.

The silence was cloisteral—and so was her life for the matter of that; and, for some reason or other, a sense of her loneliness visited her that afternoon as it had never visited her before.

There was not an instinct in her that sought release from it; but the weight of solitude was not the less oppressive because it awoke no complaint. From time to time she resumed her work, only to let her hands drop again upon her lap, and to relapse into a dreamy activity of thought.

Perhaps she was sensible of one yearning she could not repress; induced, no doubt, by the menace to her love involved in the incident of the morning—that was, for her father's sympathy.

Had she it?

Ever since her mother's death, she had been trying to persuade herself that she had; but there were moments when nature triumphed over her tender sophistry, and when a voice within her, whose language

she did not dare articulate with her tongue, pronounced her to be alone.

That afternoon this hidden voice was unusually imperious. I think the new impulse her love had received from her engagement to Louis had quickened her sensibility, and defied her to ignore the wide interval that sundered her from her father's affection.

What was her want ?

Not society. Now that she had Louis, he sufficed her ; and before him, her thoughts had been her companions. Not the pleasures of the world ; she had no desire for them. Her want was, indeed, no more than her father's love ; and this she knew was not hers, although she had over and over again appeased her longing for it by declaring to herself that she



received as much as she had a right to, and that her lowliness could not catch but the very hem of the sympathy that rose to a sphere of thought so immeasurably above the humble world of her own mind in which she lived and moved.

Be it so. But such reasoning could bring no satisfaction to those yearnings which, from time to time, grew keen in her, and pierced through the veil of sophistical argument under which she hid them.

They made her very sad that afternoon ; and when, after the long two hours she had passed under the shadow of the trees, she rose from her seat, she never remembered carrying so depressed a heart with her into her father's presence.

He was silent at the dinner-table, and

stern, plainly troubled with the memory of the morning ; and when they met, a look of deep resentment came into his face, as if the sight of her brought up all the bitterness of the insult of which she had remotely, and God knows how innocently, been the instrument.

“ There will be a storm before long,” was the first remark he made, looking out of window and pressing a handkerchief to his forehead. “ The heat has been frightful all this afternoon. I have been unable even to read.”

“ Is this Mr. Creed’s night ?” asked Helen, timidly.

“ Yes, he should be here at seven,” looking at the clock. “ I am sorry he is coming. The heat makes me so languid that I have scarcely power to converse.”

The dessert was now upon the table : and perhaps with a view of nerving himself for his evening's task, the doctor helped himself plentifully to wine.

Indeed throughout the dinner he had drank freely ; but the only effect of his libations was to bring all the gloom out of his mind into his face.

He fanned himself repeatedly with his napkin and presently went to the window.

The great bank of cloud that had lowered sullenly on the edge of the horizon, had now risen well above it : and the sun that was setting behind the house, threw a purple light upon it that produced an effect singularly sombre and ominous. This great cloud which had swallowed up the hilly horizon in its livid obscurity, made a dense black

line right across the southern sky, perfectly straight, and defined with extraordinary sharpness upon the pale and watery blue that hung, cloudless, over Milborough. Everywhere was silence so heavy as to be burdensome ; the birds were still, the very trees seemed to hold their breath ; all living things appeared to have hidden themselves and to be waiting in their retreats for the tempest that, with the majestic slowness of power, was crawling up the sky.

Dr. Fraser turned from the window and emptying the decanter of the last glass he had left in it, told Helen he would smoke a cigar in the front garden until Mr. Creed came.

Helen, leaning her head upon her hand, remained at the table with her eyes fixed

on the sky. Once she thought she heard her father's voice in the front garden, and the sound of footsteps, and concluded that Mr. Creed had arrived; but at the expiration of ten minutes the servant opened the door and announced Mr. Creed, who entered the room, making as he came forward his low bow.

"I thought you were with papa, Mr. Creed," said Helen, rising. "He told me he would wait for you in the front garden."

"I did not see him," answered Mr. Creed, looking at her and then averting his eyes.

"Then I suppose he is in the study," said Helen: and taking up the decanter of port—there was no sherry to offer—asked if he would have a glass of wine.

Mr. Creed thanked her, and while she poured the wine out, apologised for intruding, saying that it was the servant's fault who ought to have shown him into the study, but had probably supposed that Dr. Fraser was still in the dining-room.

She begged him in her sweet way not to call himself an intruder, and spoke of the approaching storm.

He remained standing, sipping his wine, and evidently in no hurry to drink it.

Yes, they were going to have a storm. The barometer was very low. He had been expecting a break-up of the splendid but very hot weather they had been having, for some days.

“ I am afraid you will not find papa very

industrious to-night," Helen said. "He complains of languor."

"Oh, his mind will recover its tone when we get upon the history. I have made a discovery to-day that will please him. Are you as much interested in antiquities as your father?"

She answered that she was afraid she was not clever enough to sympathise with such learned studies as they deserved; but she could appreciate her father's talents, and she was glad he had found a companion in his labours so well able to help and interest him with his knowledge—which her papa thought highly of—as Mr Creed.

This was almost compulsory amiability: for now that she was face to face with the young man and talking to him all the

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instinctive distrust he had inspired her with at their first meeting was renewed again with irrepressible power.

Here he was in the gloom of the twilight again, vivifying the disagreeable impression he had made on his first introduction, and looking positively spectral as he ran his little eyes, each with a faint spark in them, from her face to the floor, whilst his hair seemed densely black and his face a dark yellow.

He took about five minutes drinking his wine, during which it was plain that he was mastering every detail of Helen's face and dress with keen and furtive attention, and absorbing, if I may so express the serpentine quality of his inspection, her image into his admiration.

He had eyes that appeared to see very



well in the dark ; for as he was putting his wine-glass down, a small black cross which Helen wore upon her throat fell from the chain which had slipped at the clasp. She could not see it, though it lay at her feet ; the carpet being a deep red which was quite dark then ; but he pounced upon it instantly, as a cat would, and restored it to her.

This was an incident that was really entitled to no notice ; but it gave him a new attribute in her fancy, and added one more unpleasant interest to the disagreeable impression she had received from him.

“ I think I had better join your father now,” said he, looking at the clock.

He walked to the door and, bowing to

her, went out, closing the door behind him.

The study was nearly at the end of the hall.

Giving an apologetic knock with his knuckles, he entered.

When the sun had sunk, the trees in the grounds threw their shadow upon this study, and it was now so dark that despite Mr. Creed's feline capacity of sight, he had to peer about him before he saw the doctor.

His attention, however, was soon directed to the doctor's whereabouts by a groan, and by a hoarse voice, the tone of which he hardly recognised, exclaiming, "My God! I have killed him!"

Mr. Creed stepped up to the table, and behind it he saw Dr. Fraser kneeling and

bending over a figure that lay extended upon the hearthrug, with its head close against the fender.

"What is the matter, sir?" he asked.

"Hush!" answered the doctor, springing up: "is the door shut? See to it. Good God! what a thing to happen!"

Dark as the room was his face was quite visible by reason of its ghastly whiteness.

He drew a matchbox from his pocket; but his hand trembled so violently that he struck several matches, which his tremors extinguished, before he could get one to burn; and then he raised the tremulous flame to the chandelier and lighted the gas.

Mr. Creed looked at the body on the

hearth-rug, and said quickly, drawing in his breath—

“It is the young man who insulted you this morning!”

“He came into the front garden just now,” gasped the doctor, coming close to Mr. Creed and staring at the body, “and insisted upon speaking to me. I brought him in here, thinking that he meant to apologise for his insult; but he was intoxicated, and was no sooner in the room than he began to revile me, and repeated the infamous word he used this morning, which drove me mad, and I struck him. He fell back, O God! like a leaden figure!”

Mr. Creed went to the body and lifted its head.

There was no visible mark upon it, and

no blood ; but if he were dead, the cause of his death was plain, for his head lay close against the corner of the fender.

The face was perfectly calm ; indeed, death must have been too sudden to allow any expression of pain to pass into the face. The eyes were half-closed, and though the cheeks and brow were ashen, yet there was an expression on the whole countenance which so closely resembled a smile, that it was impossible to conceive that he was dead.

“Have you no brandy ?” asked Mr. Creed.

“Yes, here is some,” answered the doctor, whose tremors shook the table on which he leant.

He walked to the cabinet and took a silver flask from a drawer.

“Look at his teeth—they are locked; but try to force them open. My hand shakes, I can do nothing.”

He handed the flask to Mr. Creed, who drew a knife from his pocket and endeavoured to intrude the blade between the dead man's teeth.

Just then the lightning flashed upon the window, there was a few moments' silence, and then came a subdued moan of thunder.

The doctor hid his face in his hands.

The stillness that followed the thunder was rendered death-like by contrast with the sound that had preceded it. Nothing was audible but the rattling of the knife over the locked teeth which Mr. Creed tried to part in vain.

The heat was terrible; the atmosphere of the room could scarcely have been more

unendurable had the walls been of heated iron.

"You should be able to tell if he is dead, sir," exclaimed Mr. Creed, pocketing his knife.

"He is dead," sobbed the doctor.

"Come, sir, take courage. Drink some of this," said Mr. Creed, out of whose face, whatever horror the first sight of the body might have introduced, was passed and replaced by an expression impossible to describe.

He gave the flask to the doctor, who half-emptied it.

Again the lightning streamed; the thunder followed quicker now, and there was a brief fall of heavy rain-drops.

"What is to be done?" said the doctor, looking towards the window.

The storm had so darkened the air that the window-panes were black and reflected the inmates of the room in distorted outlines.

"This is a dreadful thing," answered Creed. "What does it involve? It is known that he insulted you this morning—"

"By whom?" shrieked the doctor, clenching his hands.

A crash of thunder followed the question, and in a moment the tempest was upon them.

Creed ran to close the window, and then the hail came smashing upon the panes: the wind howled and raged furiously, making the great trees roar outside with a sound like the churning of mighty breakers upon a beach; the lightning darted its



irregular flames across the heavens, throwing its ghastly blue light into the room, and illuminating the piled-up mountainous clouds which were whirled madly forwards by the hurricane, and the thunder rattled sharply and boomed along the valley.

It was impossible to speak ; but once in a momentary cessation the doctor heard a knock at the study door, and flew to it.

Helen stood outside, looking very pale and awe-struck.

"What is it?" exclaimed the doctor, pushing her a step backwards and slamming the door behind him.

"The lightning frightens me, papa. Will you let me remain with you, until—"

"Nonsense!" he interrupted fiercely. "The lightning will not hurt you. Go

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and ask one of the servants to sit with you. The storm will soon be over. I am busy and cannot be disturbed."

He re-entered the study and locked the door.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE CONCEALMENT.

"Why liest thou so on the green earth?  
'Tis not the hour of slumber—why so pale?  
What, hast thou!—thou wert full of life this morn!  
I pray thee mock me not! I smote  
Too fiercely, but not fatally. Ah why  
Wouldst thou oppose me? This is mockery,  
And only done to daunt me;—'twas a blow—  
And but a blow. Stir, stir—nay, only stir!"

BYRON.

CREED was kneeling by the dead body and examining the face.

When the doctor entered he jumped up and approached him close that the thunder

might not prevent his voice from being heard.

"This looks so much like murder," said he, "that, if only for your daughter's sake, it should be concealed."

"Murder!" gasped the doctor.

"Look at him," said Creed grasping the doctor's arm and pointing at the body, "he is dead."

The doctor shuddered and turned his head away.

"They will call it murder."

"It was an accident," moaned the doctor. "He maddened me and I struck him and he fell. . . . God! what lightning!"

"Yes, that is the truth, but who is to prove it?" answered Creed, who met the flashes with an unwinking eye, and waited

patiently until the thunder died to resume his speech.

Language cannot describe his wonderfully grotesque aspect when the lightning filled the room.

"Consider—he insulted you this morning—and here he is dead ! by your hand."

"What are you saying ?" shrieked the doctor. "Dead,—yes—by my hand—but it is not murder."

"But it will involve a trial—your name will be on all men's lips. Where is your proof that you did not kill him purposely?"

The doctor stared wildly around him and mumbled, "I have no proof—I have no proof."

"Who saw the thing done ?" Creed went on.

"Will they not credit me," answered

the doctor in a tone of deep agony : “ when I tell them my story ? how he came to me and found me calm, but enraged me with his insults ? Even then I warned him off, for my will had hold of my temper : but then came an insult that set me in a blaze—it drove me mad !”

“ But suppose they doubt this—suppose they find a verdict of guilty—”

The doctor jumped up and stamped about the room, holding both hands pressed against his temples.

The horror bid fair to drive him crazy.

It was not alone the sense that he had taken a human life : the sight of the motionless body, coupled with the crashing storm outside, slackened his nerves as if they were material strings ; the perspira-

tion poured from his forehead and his body shook with convulsions.

Creed watched him for a few moments, then followed him and grasped his arm.

"May I act for you?" he said. "Let me dictate. I am cool and can see the difficulty that will break upon your mind when the effects of this shock are passed."

The doctor bent his head forward to listen.

"You may face opinion, but it will overpower you. Is not this Lady Haddon's child? She hates you, and will call you murderer, and cry for vengeance. And do you know the opinion people have of you here? Oh, sir! pardon my freedom, but they will judge and condemn you let

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your statement be what it will, for you have shunned society, it owes you a grudge, and it will not spare you."

He had to raise his voice frequently as he spoke : for though the first fury of the storm was spent, the thunder rattled incessantly, and the heavy rain, when the wind swept it against the window, was almost deafening.

The doctor made no answer, but seized the flask and emptied it.

He then went over to the dead body and chafed its hands and lifted its head, and put his ear to the parted lips, through which the clenched teeth were visible, and listened with an air of indescribable terror in his face.

Then knowing certainly that the boy was dead, he uttered a scream and flung



himself against a chair, kneeling upon it, and burying his face in his hands.

Presently he looked up and rolled his eyes round the room.

The whole terrible incident was as yet to him no more real than a ghastly nightmare : which being so, all things he beheld seemed visionary, and he stared about him, gasping for some permanent reality whereby to hold on and steady as with a sense of life, the shock and vibration of his moral being.

Mr. Creed noticed the wild expression in the doctor's eyes, and stood in silence near the table ; and so for some minutes they thus remained, while the corpse lay mute and still upon the floor, and the ticking of the clock that was presently to discharge the skeleton from its sepulchre

sounded mournfully, and the thunder swelled into hollow distant rumblings, and naught else broke the silence of the intervals but the splashing of the rain.

Then Mr. Creed spoke.

"This thing *must* be concealed."

The doctor looked up.

"Don't you see the necessity?"

"Show it to me," the doctor mumbled.

"It is as plain to me as yonder white face. The question is, how are we to hide the body?"

"Ah, how?"

The doctor stared with an expression of crazy interest, and leaned his head forward in an eager listening attitude.

"If the body is buried it may be found. Found it ought to be, it must be, but not in a grave."

· Creed said this biting his fingers.

· Suddenly he threw his arms out.

“I have it! we must throw him into the river. Do you see! he is known to be a drunken dissolute fellow—who will say that he did not fall into the river by accident?”

The doctor looked at Creed and then at the body and muttered,

“It was an accident. He insulted me and I struck him. It was not murder. No, no, sir! it was not murder.”

O the agony in the reiteration!

“Can you prove it was not murder?” said Creed, gazing at him with his little eyes, which could be steady when they were not confronted. “What case have you?”

· “But *you* know!” cried the doctor with a sob.

“Yes, I know that this was an accident.

But on whose assurance? on yours. I am put upon oath, and what am I to say? If I am truthful this—that on entering the room I found you stooping over the dead body.”

“Trying to restore it to life!” shrieked the doctor; “you will say that?”

“Hush!” muttered Creed, looking at the door. “But if I say that I saw you endeavouring to revive the dead man, would such evidence exonerate you? In cases of murder this is the first impulse of the murderer!”

“Oh God!” burst out the wretched man, clenching his fists and striking his forehead.

“I see no alternative,” said Creed. “It must be carried to the river.”

He pointed to the body.

"By whom?"

"By us."

The doctor shuddered and grasped the back of a chair.

"Ought I to conceal this act? ought I?" he moaned. "Tell me! My brain is in a whirl. What is the penalty?"

"If the murder is proved the penalty must be death," replied Creed, lowering his face and looking at his companion under his eyebrows. "But this can be saved, and I will help you if you'll let me. Will you trust me?"

"Yes, yes, save me!" gasped the doctor, staring at the body and then averting his face.

"The risk I run will be serious," continued Creed, "but I can save an honourable man from an infamous charge. I am

alone in the world and can sacrifice nobody but myself—but you have an innocent daughter.”

He went to the window, opened it, and extended his hand.

“The rain has almost ceased,” he said.  
“Where is your hat?”

“In the hall.”

Creed opened the door stealthily, crossed to the hat-stand on tiptoe and returned, locking the door after him.

The doctor watched him leave the room with an agony of apprehension, and when he returned, shook as if he had the ague on him.

“What now?” he asked, with his teeth chattering.

“Put on your hat and get out of the window,” answered Creed.

He spoke resolutely, acting as a cool man would who plays for desperate stakes; and the doctor was governed by his will, and obeyed him mechanically.

It was easy to reach the ground from the window; and when the doctor was outside, his white face looked inwards and watched the other.

Creed went to the chandelier, and turned the gas down quite low; he then raised the body, and brought it to the window.

"This light," he whispered, "will not betray us should there be any one watching yonder. Catch hold of the feet. Have you them? Gently . . . lower them to the ground, and let him lean against the wall."

This was done, and Creed sprang through the window.

“Which is the way to the front gate?” he asked.

The doctor, shivering violently, indicated the way with a movement of his head.

“Come, sir, bear up; you will need all your courage. Take him by the arm—I will hold the other. Raise him so that his feet do not touch the ground. So. Come, now.”

This was a piece of frightful folly into which Creed was driving Fraser.

But even if the full measure of the doctor’s judgment had been vouchsafed him in that time of horror, it is still probable that he would have come under the influence of the prodigious will.



and resolution his companion was exerting, and which had transformed him from the humble, soft-speaking man, into the cool, determined, dictatorial one.

The rain had ceased now; the wind murmured among the trees, and a kind of twilight was thrown upon the air from the great rifts of blue sky among the ponderous clouds, which were rolling northwards after the storm, upon whose vanishing skirts the lightning made an embroidery of zigzag streaks.

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Holding their ghastly companion by either arm—so that, with his head fallen on one side, his trailing legs and lolling hands, he was made even in death to counterfeit the drunken part he had played so long, and with such final destruction to.

himself, in life—Creed and the doctor went round the side of the house, and reached the front garden, down which they passed, carrying their burden sideways, as the narrow flint pathway would not admit of their walking abreast, and causing the bushes to discharge the rain upon their refreshed leaves in heavy showers as they pushed past them.

This was the most critical part of their progress, and Mr. Creed incessantly encouraged the doctor with whispers, casting the while keen backward glances at the house, and straining his ears for any sound in the roadway.

He opened the gate, and they passed out, keeping close to the great hedge; and now they hurried forwards with what speed they might.

Not a living creature was to be seen.

The road was heavy with mud and pools of water, and down there to the right of the black valley, whither they were going, they could see the yellow lights of Milborough.

“Bear up, sir,” whispered Creed. “We shall be safe when we are in the lane.”

The weight of the body must have been greater to Creed than to Fraser, since they had to bear it high, in order to keep the feet from the ground, and the load would therefore press more heavily upon Creed, who was by half a foot the shorter man. But he showed no symptoms of fatigue; on the contrary, suffered the greater part of the horrid burden to weigh upon him, that the doctor might have the less to

carry, and be fitter to cope with the frightful extremity.

The doctor never spoke. From time to time deep groans broke from him as he shambled forward, and he kept on looking back, realising the grisly picture of the poet of one—

“Who on a lonesome road  
Doth walk in fear and dread”—

for behind him already followed the frightful fiend that was never more to remit its deadly pursuit.

In a few minutes, they reached the steep lane that led into the valley.

“Here we shall be safe,” exclaimed Creed—which was probable enough; for this lane, leading only to the river, was little used in the day time, and would

certainly not be used at night, even by the wayfarer in search of a short cut, since a small shower of rain was sufficient to make it thick and slippery with mud.

The storm had made the mud ankle deep ; but though neither of the men seemed to notice this for themselves, they both appeared actuated by a ghastly anxiety not to bespatter the feet of their dead burden.

When they got among the trees in the alley, and caught sight of the river, the doctor staggered and stood still.

"Come, sir, it is nearly over," exclaimed Creed, himself reeling under the full weight of the body.

"Can you finish this? I cannot," said the doctor, hoarsely.

"Give me a hand for a few steps further, and I will," replied Creed.

The doctor renewed his grip of the arm, and went forward, swaying and stumbling as if he would fall.

"Now I can manage it," said Creed; and grasping the body round the waist, he went to the river.

The doctor buried his face in his hands, and in a few seconds heard the plunge of the body, as Creed let it go feet foremost in the water.

There was a pause, and then the doctor felt Creed's hand upon his shoulder.

"It is over, and you are saved, sir. Go home now, and, if possible, let no one know that you left the house. I will return through the valley to the town. There will be an excuse for my muddy

boots, none for yours, so I pray you be careful."

Saying which he walked off, and when the doctor lifted his face from his hands he was alone.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### IN THE STUDY.

"That motley drama—oh, be sure  
It shall not be forgot !  
With its Phantom chased for evermore  
By a crowd that seize it not,  
Through a circle that ever returneth in  
To the self-same spot,  
And much of madness, and more of sin  
And horror, the soul of the plot."

E. A. POE.

FAMILIAR as the scene was to the doctor by daylight—for he would often choose this valley for his morning walk in preference to the open country about his house—it assumed in the darkness a weird



and sinister aspect, to which the great horror that overhung his heart contributed a ghastly significance.

There was no moon : but the stars that shone in the big rifts of blue, gave light enough to define the masses of black cloud which still filled the heavens. The wind, sweeping down the steep hills, filled the dark and heavy trees with strange and lamentable sounds ; and there, under the willows—dim outlines resembling spectres hanging in attitudes of grief over the water—was the river—cold, silent, and lustreless, with its stillness made terrible now by the secret it held.

“ *Now* each visitor shall confess  
The sad valley’s restlessness.  
Nothing there is motionless—  
Nothing, save the airs that brood  
Over the magic solitude.

Ah ! by no winds are stirred those trees  
That palpitate like the chill seas  
Around the misty Hebrides !  
Ah ! by no wind those clouds are driven  
That rustle through the unquiet heaven  
Unceasingly, from morn till even,  
Over the violets there that lie  
In myriad types of the human eye—  
Over the lilies there that wave  
And weep above a nameless grave.”\*

With a gesture of horror and despair, the doctor moved swiftly away, and ascended the lane, never once looking behind, but pressing blindly forward, until he reached the gate of his house.

Stealthily opening this, he crept, as a guilty thief might, round to the study window, and peering in to make sure that the

\* By Edgar Poe, the deeper and finer aspects of whose genius critics are only just now beginning to appreciate. He has been dead twenty-five years.

room was unoccupied, clambered over the sill.

This done, he turned the gas on full, drew off his boots, which were heavy and clogged with mud, and put on a pair of slippers.

He locked the boots away in a drawer, and took a brush, and endeavoured to cleanse the mud from his trousers, which he succeeded in doing only in part.

It was just nine o'clock. He must be in no hurry to quit the study, for Helen might wonder at Creed's early departure, and he must have no wonder of any kind excited.

There was a small old-fashioned mirror on the cabinet—a thing he had purchased for the curiosity of its oddly-carved frame.

He brought it under the chandelier, and studied his face in it.

He was very white, and there was a scared look in his eyes, which he endeavoured to soften by forcing a smile. But never was mockery more complete ; for it seemed to him that it was the very ghost of himself creating the idlest semblance of mirth in token that the reality of mirth was never more to be his.

He silently unlocked the door, and pushing the armchair from that part of the room where he had struck the dead man, he seated himself.

His limbs ached, his head burned ; he touched his pulse and counted the rapid beats.

He would have given much for a glass of brandy, but dared neither fetch it nor

summon a servant, lest his manner should betray the agitation he hoped presently to tranquillise.

In two short hours what a transformation had been wrought in his life!

The grotesque ornaments in which he had delighted mocked him now with their stubborn contortions, and his eyes sought the darkness without for relief from the phantasies his ugly furniture inspired.

What had he done?

His inmost consciousness emphatically knew that he had placed himself at the mercy of Creed; but his brain was too weary and troubled to decide upon the judgment he had shown by his action.

He knew in a languid and oppressed way that unless he had been willing to en-

counter the consequences of the charge of murder which public opinion, if not justice, would have preferred, he could not have done without Creed. That man's resolution had, at least, enabled him to triumph over the immediate danger; and the contingent evil threatened by Creed's possession of the secret seemed insignificant compared to the present crisis he had saved him from.

As to bewailing the deed, the sense of its irrevocability saved him from that futility.

Now that he was amid the familiar scene in which the tragedy had been enacted, it was become a permanent fact from which there was no release in fancy, which was as actual as his own consciousness, which was as inseparable a condition of his moral

being as the impulse that had wrought it, or the memory that recalled it.

He had a keen perception of the danger he had escaped. Creed's quick whispers prompting him to concealment, rang in his ears, and he repeated the arguments they vehicled with passionate sensibility.

The boy had insulted him that morning; that insult was certainly known to Creed, to Louis, and to Helen; and doubtless to others, to Lady Haddon, to Horace's friends, for he readily conceived that Louis would protest against Horace's conduct to Helen's father, and so underscore the record of the insult in the minds of those he addressed.

Here then was a damnatory premiss from which it was possible to draw the most crushing deductions.

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Who could prove that the death-blow was an accident? Who could swear that the blow was struck without intent to kill?

His delirious imagination conjured up the scene of his trial—the passionate evidence of Lady Haddon, the inconclusive testimony of Creed, the crowd murmuring against him with foregone judgment of his guilt, the keen and poisoned logic of the prosecuting advocate. . . .

He drew a deep breath.

The river had his secret: there was but one living creature between his heart and God; he had yet to betray him, and until then his life and his honour were his own.

He remained in the study until ten o'clock, and by this time he had accus-



tomed his mind to thinking that his secret was safe if he would but master his own horror, and discipline his self-consciousness.

He glanced into the looking-glass once more and was satisfied to perceive that the hour he had employed in thinking down his emotions had been profitable in respect of smoothing his face and cleansing it of something of the dark and terrified look he had brought with him into the house.

He then entered the room where Helen was.

He was careful to carry a book with him, and when he sat down he opened the book and let it lie upon his knee as an excuse to silence Helen and himself should his voice sound oddly.

He envied her deep and pure innocence, and the peace in her gentle aspect and eyes, and the sense of his guilt was redoubled when he saw her, insomuch that he had to clench his teeth and frown upon the book to keep back the groan that rose from his heart.

"Has Mr. Creed gone, papa?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered, and looked at her keenly to remark if his tone struck her.

It did not.

She said, after a pause,

"I was afraid of the lightning, papa, and would not have disturbed you but for my silly fears. I am ashamed of my cowardice now."

"Lightning is not dangerous if you do

not expose yourself to it. It was a heavy storm."

"Yes, the thunder was dreadful. Did you leave the window open?"

"Yes—no—I forget," he answered. "Neither Creed nor I care much for thunder and lightning. I, for one, welcomed the storm, for it cooled the air."

He bent his eyes upon the book, fearful of talking too much lest the tone of his voice should contrast with the sense of his words.

Helen went on with her sewing, and he began to breathe freely when he found that there was no pertinacity in her glances.

He feared her more than anybody else; and if she witnessed no change in him

now that little more than an hour had passed since he had acted in the most horrible part of the tragedy—he need fear no other eyes on the morrow.

END OF VOL. I.











